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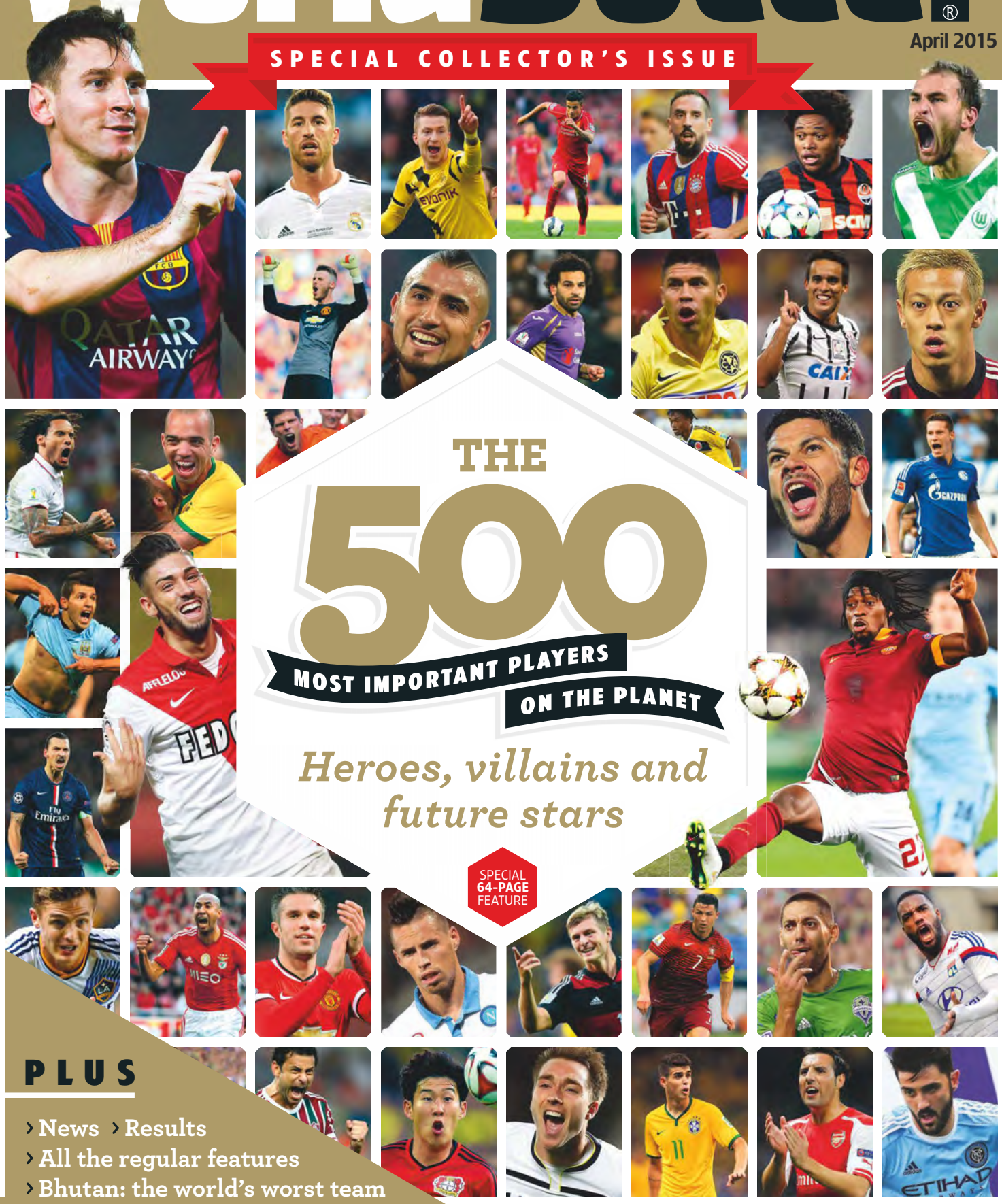

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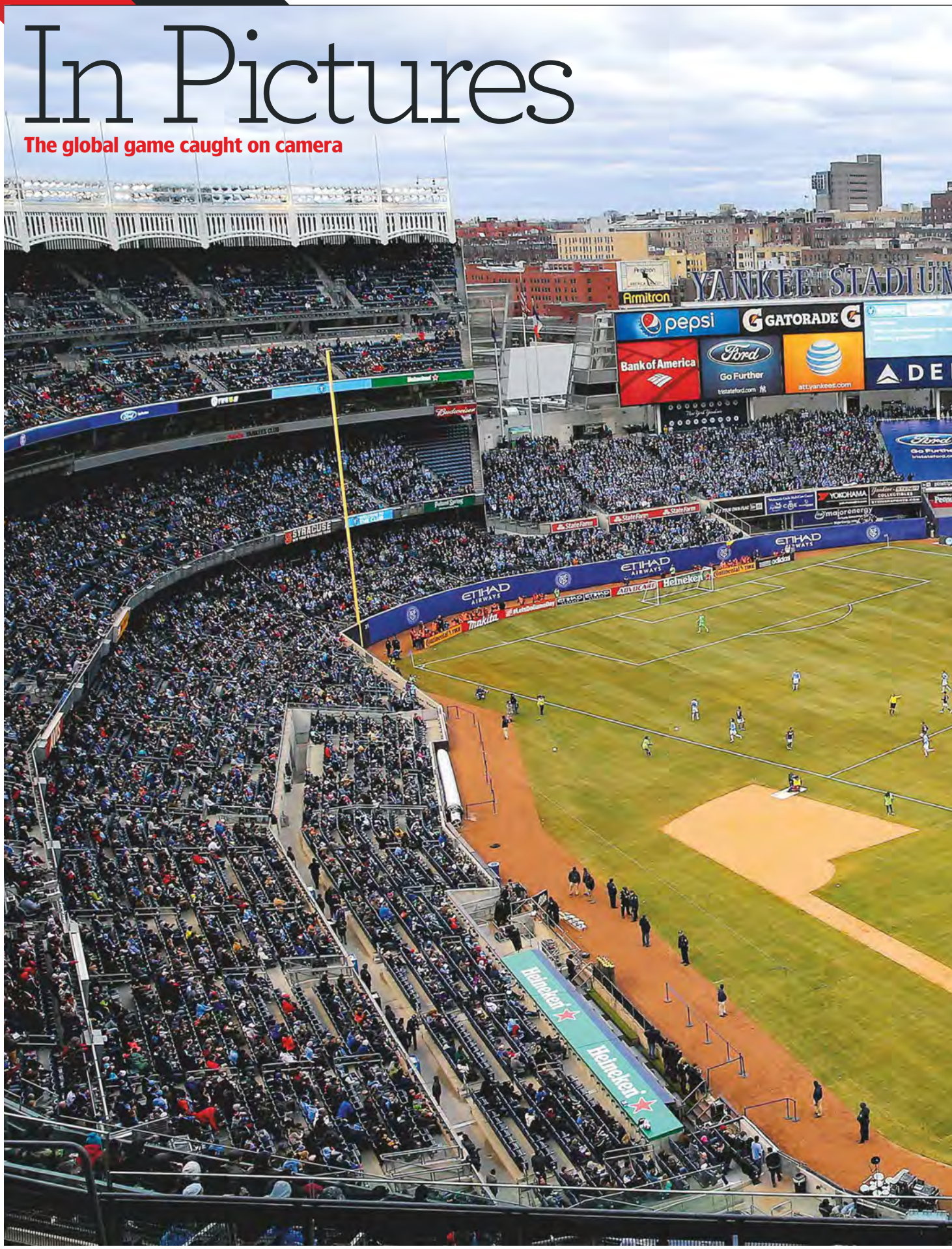
In Pictures

The global game caught on camera



USA...the iconic Yankee Stadium, home of the New York Yankees baseball team, stages its first-ever MLS match as 2015 residents New York City take on New England Revolution

AUSTRALIA...Kerem Bulut of Western Sydney Wanderers celebrates scoring against local rivals Sydney

SOUTH KOREA...Gamba Osaka's Lima stands in front of the wall as Seongnam defend a free-kick in the AFC Champions League

ITALY...police detain a Feyenoord fan ahead of the Europa League match against Roma in the Italian capital

ENGLAND...Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho shows his excitement at winning the League Cup Final against Tottenham Hotspur

ARGENTINA...Boca Juniors celebrate Daniel Osvaldo's goal against Zamora in the Libertadores Cup with a photo taken by a member of the coaching staff

SPAIN...Barcelona's Lionel Messi is surrounded by Rayo Vallecano players as he attempts to find team-mate Luis Suarez

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

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FROM THE EDITOR

Heard the one about the Englishmen, the Irishman and the 54 Brazilians? The World Soccer 500 list, which we publish for the first time this month (a special feature, starting on page 31) will be a valuable snapshot of the global game in 2015.

The WS500 is not intended to be the definitive list of the world's "best" players. Our annual World Player poll has always been a more accurate reflection of performances on the pitch. But, hopefully, the WS500 will provoke debate and discussion about nationality and the world's best leagues. That is especially the case in an era when a handful of the world's richest clubs are stockpiling players at an alarming rate.

> It is clear from recent results that English clubs have much to do if they are to be considered among the European elite

Although the WS500 features more players from the Premier League than any other league, it is clear from recent results in European competition that English clubs have much to do if they are to be considered among the European elite.

I hope you can join the debate online at worldsoccer.com and #WS500.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Qatar winter dates ..... page 14
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3 Parma declared bankrupt ..... page 11
4 Dave Mackay dies ..... page 13
5 Bhutan win as World Cup qualifiers start ..... page 24
6 Olsen to stand down as Denmark coach ..... page 120
7 Messi leads the Golden Shoe rankings ..... page 124
8 Chinese league attracts big-name signings ..... page 110
9 Borussia Dortmund recovery continues ..... page 116
10 AZ hire Billy Beane ..... page 17

SWITZERLAND

FIFA confirm 2022 winter switch

A FIFA task force has recommended that the 2022 World Cup in Qatar should be played between late November and late December, with the Final played on December 18, National Day in Qatar, in order to avoid unplayable summer temperatures.

"For us it's a major step, because finally we know and we can move forward," said FIFA communications director Walter De Gregorio. "At least we know that the final will not be the 23rd [of December], so time to make Christmas shopping and time to go home."

Qatar won the hosting rights with promises of stadium-cooling technology to make conditions in the Middle East playable in the summer.

The biggest opposition to the winter switch came from the major European leagues, home to the top players in the world, which would have to interrupt their season for up to seven weeks to accommodate the tournament.

FIFA confirmed clubs will share a pot of £142million for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. The pot was £47m for Brazil and only £27m in South Africa in 2010.

"Billy thinks two steps ahead when it comes to innovation"

AZ director Earnie Stewart on Billy Beane, the American inspiration for the "Moneyball" theory of constructing a winning team on a budget, who has joined the Dutch club as a consultant

ITALY

Parma declared bankrupt

Parma have been declared bankrupt by a court in Italy but will be allowed to see out of the rest of the season. The club's debts are estimated at nearly €75million.

In a surprise move, club president Giampietro Manenti, who had promised to clear the debts when he took over last month, was arrested after being accused of involvement in a credit card scam.

The Italian league has allocated €5m so the league's bottom club can fulfil their fixtures.

Shut....a "closed for robbery" banner at the Parma stadium

HEROES & VILLAINS

GUSTAVO BOU

Scored two hat-tricks in two successive Libertadores Cup matches for Racing as they beat Deportivo Tachira of Ecuador 5-0 and Guarani of Paraguay 4-1.

ALBERTO BUENO

The first Rayo Vallecano player to score four goals in a top-flight game – all in 15 first-half minutes, including a perfect hat-trick of left foot, right foot and head – as they beat Levante 4-2.

Hat-tricks...Racing's Bou scored successive trebles

DANIEL OSVALDO

The Italian international who was born in Buenos Aires joined boyhood idols Boca Juniors on loan from Southampton and scored the winning goal on his debut as they beat Wanderers from Uruguay 2-1 in the Libertadores Cup at the Bombonera stadium.

MARC JANKO

The Sydney striker scored a hat-trick and broke records aplenty in the A-League game against Western Sydney Wanderers, including beating Besart Berisha's league record by scoring in a seventh consecutive match and beating Alessandro Del Piero's club record of 14 goals for the season.

A-League star...Janko has set new scoring records

Kidding about...Ujah grabs Hennes, the Cologne mascot

ANTHONY UJAH

The Cologne forward had to apologise to the club mascot, Hennes the goat, after grabbing the animal by the horns while celebrating his goal in a 4-2 Bundesliga victory over Eintracht Frankfurt. "Sorry Hennes. I was a bit too rough on him," wrote a sheepish Ujah on Twitter.

FABIO CANNAVARO

Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning captain was handed a 10-year jail sentence for entering his property after it had been seized by the authorities, following Cannavaro being under investigation for tax evasion. The sentence was suspended on appeal until the final verdict.

FEYENOORD FANS

Caused trouble in both legs of their Europa League match with Roma. The Dutch club were charged with racist abuse and the throwing of objects during the second leg in Rotterdam.

OLEKSANDR KUCHER

The Shakhtar Donetsk defender's red card after three minutes against Bayern Munich was the quickest in Champions League history.

"When he goes, people will come to realise that coaches of his calibre aren't found on every corner"

Marseille midfielder Dimitri Payet (left) responds gloomily to rumours that Marcelo Bielsa will quit in May

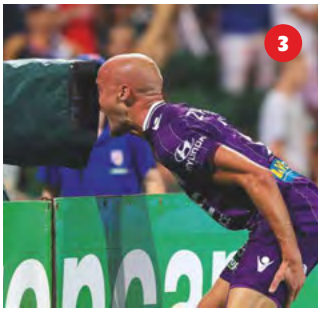
GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/2rdAgW

1 CARLOS TEVEZ
Juventus v Borussia Dortmund
Scores with virtually no back lift, from the edge of the area in the Champions League.

2 BRIAN FERNANDEZ
Racing v Sporting Cristal
Peels away from the wall at a free-kick and receives a short pass before firing home.

3 RUBEN ZADKOVICH
Perth Glory v Wellington Phoenix
Hits an unstoppable right-foot shot from 25 yards in off the post and then celebrates in style in front of a TV camera.



4 ANASS ACHAHBAR
Feyenoord v PSV
Lets a long pass from Rick Karsdorp drop over his shoulder before turning and volleying home.

5 WENDELL LIRA
Goianesia v Atletico Goianese
A well-worked team move is finished off with a spectacular bicycle kick on the turn in a Goias state championship game.

6 STEPHEN O'DONNELL
Partick Thistle v Dundee United
In a sweeping move that goes from one end of the pitch to the other, the winger receives a back-heeled pass from team-mate Lyle Taylor before dummying an opposing defender and curling a left-foot shot inside the post for the visitors in their Scottish Premier League game at Tannadice Park.

WINNERS

LIONEL MESSI
Set a new record as his treble against Rayo Vallecano gave him a 32nd hat-trick in Spanish football.

DAVID WILSON
The Scotsman, who settled in Gibraltar after being based there with the British navy, will be interim coach for their Euro qualifier against Scotland at Hampden Park.

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES
The MLS club ended a 16-match winless run by beating Seattle Sounders 3-2 in their second game of the season.

LOSERS

DOOSAN
Bottom of the table in Guam, they lost 24-1 to league leaders Rovers and had no points from 11 games, with a goal difference of minus 119.

ZIMBABWE
Failure to pay former coach Jose Claudinei's wages saw the team expelled from the 2018 World Cup.

ENGLISH CLUBS
For the first time since 1992 there are no English representatives in the quarter-finals of the European club competitions.

"I'm thirsty for competition and challenges. I'm hungry. Very hungry"

Herve Renard, the French coach who has been an African Nations Cup winner with Zambia and Ivory Coast

OBITUARIES

Dave MACKAY (1934–2015)
Dave Mackay, who died aged 80, was one of the most outstanding British footballers of the 1960s and one of the greatest in the history of Tottenham Hotspur.

The former Hearts and Scotland midfielder was a key member – from left-half – of Spurs' 1961 league and FA Cup double-winning team. He also won the FA Cup in 1962 and 1967, and was capped 22 times by Scotland.

As a manager, he led Derby County to the league championship in 1975.

Mackay began his career with Hearts in 1953 and captained the Edinburgh side to the Scottish title during the 1957-58 season.

He moved to Tottenham in 1959 and helped the north London club become the first English side to win the double that century. However, injury meant he missed the Cup-winners Cup Final victory over Atletico Madrid in 1963, when Tottenham became the first British club to win a European trophy.

The Edinburgh-born player helped Tottenham retain the FA Cup the following season and he was captain when Spurs lifted the trophy in 1967.

A club statement said: "We were saddened to hear of the death of our former captain Dave Mackay. He was a superb player who possessed all the technique, passing ability and talent to be the complete footballer.

Spurs skipper...Mackay

"He was the heart-beat of our 1961 'double' side, was then a key member of the team that retained the FA Cup the following season and, although injury kept him out of our 1963 European Cup-winners Cup final triumph, he had played a vital role in getting us there.

"He formed a marvellous midfield combination with Danny Blanchflower and, when the Northern Ireland international left us in 1964, Mackay took over as Spurs captain and led us to another FA Cup triumph in 1967. He twice broke the same leg in our cause but, each time, came back stronger than ever."

Former England international Alan Mullery – who joined Spurs in the same year as Mackay before the pair won the FA Cup together in 1967 – also paid tribute.

He said: "He is the most influential footballer I've ever met, one of the bravest of all leaders. He was the William Wallace of football. He just wanted to win every game."

Mackay left Tottenham to join Derby County in 1968 and helped Brian Clough's side win promotion to the First Division the following year before taking up a player-manager role at Swindon Town in 1971.

A year later Mackay left Swindon to manage Nottingham Forest for a brief spell before succeeding Clough as Derby manager in 1973, with the Rams winning the First Division title in 1975.

Glory...Mackay lifts the FA Cup in 1967

Antonio BETANCORT (1937–2015)
The former Real Madrid and Spain goalkeeper won six Liga titles. Although he played in every one of Real's games until the semi-finals on their way to a sixth European Cup in 1966, he tore a muscle against Internazionale and missed the Final against Partizan Belgrade.

Steve MOKONE (1933–2015)
Steve "Kalamazoo" Mokone was the first black South African footballer to play professionally in Europe.

He joined Coventry City in 1955 and later moved to Dutch side Heracles, where he enjoyed considerable success and had a stand at the club's Polman Stadion named after him.

He subsequently played for Cardiff City, Barcelona, Marseille, Torino and Valencia before moving to the USA, where he became an assistant professor in psychiatry.

Real keeper... Betancort in action at Chelsea

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Decision...the World Cup Final in Qatar will be held on December 18, 2022

Qatar cool about 2022 winter finals

The Qataris have always been the coolest people in football when it comes to the World Cup timing switch in 2022. As FIFA president Sepp Blatter led the rest of the game – gently in some cases, kicking and screaming in others – towards the inevitable, so the hosts just carried on with the job of preparing the Gulf ground.

In the end, the English Premier League was the only domestic competition to put up any show of resistance. Agreeing a massive hike in the player-use payments neutered any other potential rebels. UEFA – almost in delight at seeing club football trumped by the international game – endorsed president Michel Platini's enthusiasm for a winter switch.

UEFA's only "defeat" was in failing to secure December 23 for the Final. A later date would have enabled the European federation to squeeze in another of its own competition dates. Instead, Blatter, religiously and traditionally impelled to protect Christmas, insisted on December 18.

That also happens to be Qatar's National Day, seen as a happy coincidence by Hassan Al Thawadi, secretary-general of the Gulf state's Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy.

Ultimately, worldwide reaction to the timing switch was comparatively muted. Europe's autumn-to-spring leagues are in the minority on a worldwide basis. It does no harm for them to be reminded, once in a while, that football does not revolve only around that corner of the planet.

Also, the English language media commands the Blatter/FIFA-sceptic community across the world game. This creates a false impression. Blatter may not boast a fan club but this matters not in the imminent presidency election argument. Fans have no vote, only the leaders of those many national associations which benefit handsomely from FIFA's largesse.

Hence switching the World Cup date was never likely to figure in the political calculations, unless the leagues galvanised their own national federations. Here, the European Professional Football Leagues proved singularly ineffective. A belated whinge after the event was mere window dressing. Basically, the majority won the day; democracy in action.

Maybe the FIFA story would have been different had proposals in the 1960s to hand the major nations weighted voting powers been enacted. They were rejected because president Stanley Rous believed in one man (or member) one vote.

February 24 was the date on which the calendar committee, a round table of "football stakeholders" headed by Asian confederation president Sheikh Salman Ebrahim Al Khalifa, decided that the only practical compromise for 2022 had to be November-December. The recommendation was rubber-stamped by FIFA's executive committee in the first session of its two-day meeting, on March 19 and 20.

Even then FIFA tripped over its own feet. The afternoon of March 19 was supposed to be all about women's football, with the announcement of the host of the 2019 Women's World Cup. Instead the French "victory" over South Korea was relegated to a media footnote by the Qatar dates decision.

FIFA's communications gurus had realised too late that the Qatar confirmation was bound to leak and made a formal announcement ahead of time, prompting a wry aside from Blatter at the post-ExCo press conference the following day.

Of course, the decision made headlines around the world. The only man who appeared somewhat underwhelmed was

> "It's time to move ahead and continue with the delivery of the World Cup"
> Hassan Al Thawadi

World Cup 2026

A World Cup bid campaign for the 2026 finals will be launched shortly after FIFA Congress in May. Europe and Asia, as recent host confederations, will be barred from bidding, which leaves the likelihood of an Americas/Africa shoot-out. A shortlist will be generated for a host vote by congress in 2017 in Kuala Lumpur.

World Cup 2018

Moscow's Luzhniki will stage the opening match of the 2018 World Cup on June 14. It will also host the second semi-final (July 11) and Final (July 15). St Petersburg will stage the first semi (July 10) and third-place play-off (July 14). St Petersburg will also take a central role in the 2017 Confederations Cup, with the opening match (June 17) and Final (July 2). The semi-finals will be in Kazan (June 28) and Sochi (June 29).

Al Thawadi. His overriding satisfaction was that an issue whose every headline had been decorated with all the other controversies had finally been settled. The Rubicon had been crossed. But for Qatar it made not the slightest difference to the practical building of the World Cup stage.

"I understand concerns among some members of the European football community," said Al Thawadi. "But, at the same time, people within the European football community have also come out and supported that decision. So now it's time to move ahead and continue with the delivery of the World Cup."

Playing in winter rather than summer would make no difference to the development and application of air-cooling, although there is an argument – based on conditions during the World Youth Cup in neighbouring UAE 18 months ago – that it is unnecessary.

Al Thawadi insisted: "We've always been committed to our bid-book promises, regardless of when the World Cup will be held. In 2014 there was significant investment in terms of cooling technology for two fan zones and the stadia are all going ahead with cooling technology.

"The idea of transforming the cooling atmosphere within the training sites into greenhouses for the sake of providing food was part of our legacy commitment so, in terms of the action on the ground, it's business as usual."

In terms of the wider value of the World Cup, this is nothing like business as usual. That is the real, exciting intrigue of the 2022 World Cup.

FIFA, like it or not, has blazed a trail. It took the World Cup to Africa before the Olympics had even been to South America. Bringing the World Cup to the Middle East is a step whose significance has been overlooked in all the Qatar fuss.

"We've always believed this World Cup is a platform that has positive impacts on many different fronts, one of them in allowing people to understand the Middle East and creating a bridge between East and West," added Al Thawadi.

"We have the capacity in Qatar to host the World Cup, but our goal is for the world to experience the Middle East, the richness of Middle Eastern culture.

"You have distinct experiences from skiing in Lebanon to diving in Oman – many opportunities for people who are visiting the Middle East for the first time.

"That's part of why we want to encourage the fans to come though, if they just want to come and stay in Doha, they will be more than welcome."

The combustible context of Middle East politics is an inevitable accompaniment but then the organisers of sport's two mega events are no strangers to the particular sport v politics challenge. It's a fact of daily life for FIFA and IOC, no matter how many times they rearrange the semantics within their statutes and charters.

The one Qatar-specific issue which will remain a thorn in FIFA's side concerns the rights and conditions of migrant workers.

The Supreme Committee has set its own standards for World Cup-specific projects which are beyond anything enacted until now in the Gulf. Government ministers, while promising change, refuse to be nailed down to a specific deadline.

All the stadia in Qatar are going ahead with cooling technology

Qatar supremo... Hassan Al Thawadi

Al Thawadi's hope is that the rest will follow where the Supreme Committee leads. He says: "We made a commitment at the very beginning that the health and safety and dignity of every single person working on the World Cup is of paramount importance for us.

"The standards within our tender process with any contractor – covering areas of recruitment, accommodation, health and safety and repatriation – are in place. We are developing them, we are in discussion with NGOs, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Labor Organisation on ways of improving these standards and making them more practicable in terms of implementation.

"A lot of other infrastructural stakeholders – QatarRail for example – are working on improving their own standards so progress is being made. It's a gradual process but I'm proud to say many international NGOs have recognised the steps being taken."

To help, Qatar's "dummy run" in 2021 will be the usual December staging of the Club World Cup, with the Confederations Cup played elsewhere in Asia.

But, make no mistake, in 2022, the world – and the World Cup – will revolve around Qatar. Who knows, it could be an eye-opener in ways the game has yet to comprehend. **WS**

FIFA to pay clubs for players

FIFA, to keep clubs happy, settled on almost trebling the sum paid for the use of World Cup players. In agreement with the European Club Association, FIFA will stump up, for both Russia in 2018 and Qatar in 2022, $209million. This compares with $40m in South Africa in 2010 and $70m in Brazil last year. Most will end up in Europe, whose clubs provide 75 per cent of players at the finals.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

The diving witch-hunt is a threat to the entire sport

Sin or sinner...Orlando's Kevin Molino pleads his innocence after being booked for a dive against New York City

The words "simulating action" first appeared in the FIFA rule book in 1999. Not in the rules themselves, but in the "Decisions of the International FA Board" addenda. That is still the case – the wording has changed; we now have "attempts to deceive the referee by feigning injury or pretending to have been fouled (simulation)" – but the reference is in an addendum, now titled "Guidelines for referees".

The offence is not in any way singled out, not flagged as being particularly heinous, and is merely number six in a list of 13 "unsporting behaviour" offences for which a caution must be issued.

> Diving has risen to the top of the referee's list of unforgivable crimes

So far so good. We've had some 26 years of official condemnation of diving. But during that time diving – the popular word, though not one used in the rule book – has risen to the top of the referees' list of unforgivable crimes.

It has become a "scourge", it is a "cancer", it is "despicable", it must be "stamped out", it is cheating – something that, apparently, is unheard of anywhere else in the sport.

The atmosphere of righteous indignation against divers has been allowed to overheat and has turned into a witch-hunt. And man has yet to find anything more destructive of sensible judgment than a witch-hunt.

Clear, almost laughable, evidence of that came in the opening week of the USA's MLS. Referee Alan Kelly, an Irishman, doled out three yellow cards for diving against Orlando City. How strange that in all 10 MLS games that weekend, there were 35 yellow cards – but Kelly's trio were the only ones issued for diving.

All three of Kelly's calls were contentious, with the replays either inconclusive or showing clear contact – enough to indicate the calls were made without the solid proof that should surely be necessary.

Witch-hunt calls, that is. There have been spectacularly atrocious examples of such calls in the English Premier League. Enough, one would have thought, for the refs themselves to back off and question their own actions.

There is an ugly adjective that doctors use: iatrogenic. It describes any effect, good or bad, that results from their treatment. The doctors admit that diseases can be inadvertently caused by treatment, that sometimes the cure can be worse than the disease.

The honesty involved in that admission is sadly lacking from the referee ranks. It has yet to be acknowledged that the current hysteria surrounding simulation has been created largely by the referees themselves and their highly publicised – and frequently incorrect – anti-diving calls. It is a refogenic problem.

Obviously, simulation is not a figment of referee imagination. It exists. But the extent of it has been enormously exaggerated by the referees and their bosses, while the nature of the offence has been unpleasantly transformed from a simple foul on a football field into a moral offence that apparently threatens to undermine the entire sport. And most of that elaboration is refogenic. The cure offered by the referees – the witch-hunt – is worse than the offence.

We have now reached the stage where virtually every time a player goes to ground the expectation is that it must either be a free-kick, maybe a penalty, or a dive. Players are routinely accused – mostly by television commentators – of "going down too easily", but the commentators, like the referees, are making their judgments too easily. This is a complicated matter that needs careful, clear-minded attention. There is no way it is going to get that from referees involved in a witch-hunt.

The bad calls they make have surely unwanted ramifications. Innocent players are punished and dubbed as "cheats", while a message is sent to clumsy or rough defenders that the referees are on their side and are looking not for violent fouls but for simulation.

A refogenic problem indeed. The very people who should have been the voice of reason, the referees, have jumped in, whistles ablaze, to make matters worse, because they operate under the self-imposed burden of needing to justify their over-reaction.

What the witch-hunting refs will do – and are doing – is to exacerbate matters. They are out there on a crusade, determined to expose the infidel divers. So they will find divers wherever they look – even to the point of inventing them and their actions, as Kelly so ludicrously did in the Orlando game.

The travesty involved in so many of the diving calls reflects badly on the whole of refereedom. But it is something that they have brought on themselves. More medical wisdom – this time with Biblical authority – is appropriate: Referee, heal yourself. WS

"It was like swimming with wet clothes on."

Atletico Madrid's Fernando Torres on his time at Chelsea

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Short-term...McCall

EUROPE

DICK ADVOCAAT, who resigned as coach of Serbia in November, was appointed boss of Premier League relegation battlers Sunderland until the end of the season.

EDY REJA, who had been out of work since parting company with Lazio last year, replaced Stefano Colantuono as coach of Atalanta in Serie A. Cagliari reappointed **ZDENEK ZEMAN** after sacking Gianfranco Zola.

DOMINIQUE ARRIBAGE replaced Alain Casanova as coach of Ligue 1 side Toulouse.

Hamburg sporting director **PETER KNAEBEL** took charge of the relegation-threatened Bundesliga side after they sacked coach Joe Zinnbauer.

In Holland, **ALFONS GROENENDIJK** replaced Foeke Booy as coach of Eredivisie strugglers Go Ahead Eagles and **JAN EVERSE** took over from Ernie Brandts at Dordrecht.

Romania's most-capped player **DORINEL MUNTEANU,** who won 134 caps for his country, was appointed coach of Astra Giurgiu, who parted company with Oleg Protasov after less than five months in the job.

GIORGOS GEORGIADIS took charge of PAOK until the end of the season after the Greek Super League club sacked coach Angelos Anastasiadis.

Ex-Motherwell boss **STUART MCCALL** replaced caretaker Kenny McDowall as manager of Scottish second-tier side Rangers until the end of the season.

Peru choice...Gareca (right)

SOUTH AMERICA

Peru appointed Argentinian **RICARDO GARECA** as coach.

Uruguay midfielder **CRISTIAN RODRIGUEZ** joined Brazilian side Gremio on a three-month loan from Atletico Madrid of Spain.

Former Paraguay coach **FRANCISCO ARCE** replaced Nery Pumpido as boss of Olimpia.

AFRICA

Former France midfielder **ALAIN GIRESSE**, who led Mali to third place in the 2012 African Nations Cup, returned as national coach for a second time, replacing Henryk Kasperczak. **ALIOU CISSE** replaced him as coach of Senegal.

Former Valencia and Internazionale boss **HECTOR CUPER** was named coach of Egypt's national side, while German **GERNOT ROHR** took charge of Burkina Faso.

ASIA

Ex-Algeria coach **VAHID HALILHODZIC** took charge of Japan's national team.

GIORGIOS DONIS was appointed coach of two-time continental champions Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia.

AKRAM AHMED SALMAN took charge of Iraq following the departure of Radhi Shenaishil, who led the side to a fourth-place finish at the Asian Cup.

OUT

Gone...Flores

EUROPE

QUIQUE SANCHEZ FLORES stepped down as coach of Getafe after less than two months in charge of the Spanish side. Cordoba dismissed **MIROSLAV DJUKIC**.

FRED RUTTEN has said he will step down as Feyenoord coach at the end of the season.

ALLEN BULA was sacked as coach of Gibraltar.

Estoril dismissed coach **JOSE COUCEIRO** after they lost their last five Portuguese league games.

SOUTH AMERICA

Uruguay's most-capped player **DIEGO FORLAN**, who won 112 caps for his country and scored 36 goals, quit international football.

AFRICA

Ivory Coast Goalkeeper **BOUBACAR BARRY**, who scored the winning penalty in this year's African Nations Cup Final, has retired from international football.

ASIA

Australia midfielder **MARK BRESCIANO** announced his international retirement, having won 84 caps.

No more caps...Forlan

Moneyball man Billy joins AZ

BILLY BEANE, the general manager of Oakland A's baseball team and the subject of the 2003 film *Moneyball* starring Brad Pitt, has taken an advisory role with Eredivisie side AZ.

Dutch job...Beane

"It upsets Cristiano that he's not compared to Cruyff or Pele"

Former Barcelona striker Hristo Stoichkov does his best to infuriate Cristiano Ronaldo

ITALY

National team coach Antonio Conte admitted for the first time that Manchester United tried to hire him as their manager last year.

Conte, who left Juventus having won three consecutive Serie A titles, told TV presenter Piero Chiambretti: "There was a very strong Premiership club that came looking for me. In the end, they settled for a guy who previously had coached a national team."

Given that Louis Van Gaal, the man who coached Holland to a splendid third place finish at last summer's World Cup finals in Brazil, then went on to take over as manager at Old Trafford, it would seem fairly obvious that Manchester United were the club "looking" for Conte.

Paddy Agnew

GERMANY

Ever since RB Leipzig, the ambitious eastern German branch of the Red Bull empire, fired coach Alexander Zorniger it's been widely assumed that at the end of the season, the job will go to the highly rated ex-Mainz boss Thomas Tuchel.

But "Leipziger" technical director Ralf Rangnick revealed in an interview in *Bild* that current Hoffenheim team leader Markus Gisdol also would fit the bill.

Would he really contemplate quitting the elite?

Nick Bidwell

Candidate...Gisdol

Notebook

Highlights from some of our correspondents' **regular on-line** contributions

Chants...Castro

BRAZIL

After a dreadful 2014, much is expected of Brazil's experienced contingent in this year's Libertadores Cup. They have a huge financial advantage and can snap up big-name players from elsewhere on the continent – and even Europe in the case of Anderson, who joined Internacional from Manchester United.

He, though, had a Libertadores debut to forget and was subbed after 35 minutes away to The Strongest of Bolivia, unable to cope with the altitude of La Paz.

In the conditions the 3-1 defeat was not a surprise and perhaps 2013 champions Atletico Mineiro had more cause for concern after a very poor second-half performance and a 2-0 defeat away to Colo Colo of Chile.

Theirs is a difficult group, as is that of Sao Paulo, who have much to think about after getting their campaign off to a dismal start, also going down 2-0.

The one bright spot for Brazil was that the conquerors of Sao Paulo were local rivals Corinthians, taking promising shape in this latest spell under consistently impressive coach Tite.

The opening goal, finished off by Elias after a quality passing move, is something the 2015 model Corinthians are seeking to produce on a regular basis – a good sign both for their Libertadores campaign and for Brazilian football.

Tim Vickery

Start...Brazilian clubs kicked off their Libertadores Cup campaigns

SPAIN

The death of a Deportivo La Coruna fan before the Atletico Madrid game this season has led to a crusade to stamp out violence from Spanish football, with La Liga reporting offensive chants at stadiums all round the country.

In many cases, there is a risk of them going too far, denouncing chants that are as harmless as they are meaningless, placing a few swear words on a level with a murder.

But one chant that was denounced is extremely unpleasant. Real Betis striker Ruben Castro has been charged with domestic violence against his ex-girlfriend and Betis fans sang: "Ruben Castro, ale / Ruben Castro, ale / It's not your fault / She was a whore / You did the right thing."

Sid Lowe

New feature Weekly notes from Brazil, Spain, Germany and Italy at **worldsoccer.com**

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Morally bankrupt Chelsea were an embarrassment

Can all those grandiose claims for the Premier League be put to rest for a while? It may well be the richest league in the world, but recent deeply embarrassing results suggest that such claims are grossly exaggerated.

Chelsea's ignominious defeat by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League with 10 PSG players on the field, not only in normal but in extra time as well, was as humiliating as it was inept. Moreover, the way in which PSG's famous, if abrasive, centre-forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic was sent off reflected abysmally on Chelsea's – let us say it – morality.

There is still some controversy over the decision, with Gary Lineker, hardly the least shrewd of observers, among those who deemed the expulsion unfair. But the repugnant way in which Chelsea's players bayed around the referee, Bjorn Kuipers, insisting that Ibrahimovic be expelled for a foul on Oscar, was beyond excuse.

That subsequently Chelsea, with their host of expensive stars, should not be able to overcome PSG – themselves admittedly backed by Qatari millions – was lamentable.

Two of the strongest critics of this behaviour were Jamie Carragher and Graeme Souness, admittedly no angel himself in his distinguished playing days, but they were entitled to their damning opinions and the response of Jose Mourinho was limp to a degree.

He admitted he had never been a player of any consequence himself, but he was a successful manager. Souness and Carragher, by contrast, had been fine footballers but unsuccessful or untried in management. Souness, in fact, had a considerable managerial career, even if it didn't bring him the titles and honours gained by Mourinho. But so what? By extension, Mourinho's dubious logic would debar any sports writer from expressing criticisms of him or of his high standing.

The bleak fact is that with all their costly talent Chelsea couldn't even eke out a victory against a team which played the bulk of the 120 minutes reduced to those 10 gallant men.

Pressure...referee Kuipers, besieged by Chelsea players, brings out a red card for Ibrahimovic

> The repugnant way they bayed round the referee, insisting that Ibrahimovic should be expelled, was beyond excuse

Duckenfield: the inadequate villain

David Duckenfield's abject confession to the Hillsborough inquiry merely confirmed what was surely and devastatingly well known almost since the tragedy occurred.

That is to say, as he confessed, he was pitchforked into a role for which he was utterly unprepared and unqualified; that he himself, however much he now confesses to having lied, was responsible for the opening of a gate through which crowds of Liverpool fans disastrously poured; and that his appointment followed the removal of the colleague who had successfully presided over the exactly equivalent semi-final a year before on the alleged grounds of ignoring indiscipline.

In my opinion the buck stops there with the senior officer who removed a competent policeman from the role and thrust in one who, by his own plaintive confession at the current investigation, had no experience of crowd control.

Confessions...but Duckenfield is not the real culprit of the Hillsborough disaster (top)

Duckenfield now expresses his shame for having lied about opening the gate which resulted in the fans' invasion. But for all his pathetic true confessions, the real culprit was the senior officer responsible for putting him in charge. It should not be impossible to discover his identity. There have already been shocking confessions by senior policemen of the lengths they went to, to obscure their shameful culpability.

Duckenfield described himself somewhat paradoxically as "a very honest person". A very inadequate person would be more to the point, but his is not the ultimate responsibility for what happened.

Ramsey and Rangers on a death wish

Queens Park Rangers are a team in dire trouble with not even a Harry "Houdini" Redknapp to get them out of their relegation scrap. Certainly to have appointed in his place the coach Chris Ramsey seems more and more like a disastrous false economy.

In case I am now bombarded with accusations of racism, may I say it would not trouble me at all if every manager and senior coach in the Premier League was black. But QPR's flamboyant and loquacious owner Tony Fernandes may be regretting now that he wasn't prepared to shell out the money demanded by Tim Sherwood.

Seeing what Sherwood has so dramatically accomplished at Aston Villa in such a short time, could his price not have been justified were he to have saved QPR from relegation which in itself would, under present financial regulation, reportedly cost them £150million or so?

By contrast, Ramsey looks hopelessly out of his depth. The team he so bizarrely put out at Crystal Palace was a ragbag. It ludicrously didn't include Bobby Zamora, whose recent volleyed goal at Sunderland was a master stroke. But he did exhume Shaun Wright-Phillips, who had not started in the Premier League for 770 days and, alas, looked like it. And exposing the raw 19-year-old full-back Darnell Furlong to the pace and skills of Yannick Bolasie was senseless and predictably disastrous.

Ramsey's tenure reportedly runs to the end of the season. But his appointment has represented a kind of death wish.

Troubled times... Ramsey and his players taste another defeat

Memories of Mackay

Recently I had a couple of obituaries of the late Dave Mackay published in the *Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*, eliciting a letter from a Newcastle United fan, Mr Richard Harrison, which took issue with comments about the "rough hewn" Mackay.

He wrote: "I am sure you will remember the best-ever uncapped centre-forward who played for Newcastle in the 1950s – Len White. During a match Mackay broke Len's leg in a tackle which was disgraceful even for those times. Len was never the same player again, even though he returned to football and played on into his fifties."

A sad story indeed, though it has to be said Mackay twice suffered a broken leg. He boasted of never being sent off, but when at Derby County in his latter days, a shocking foul should have done so only for him to tell the referee in all arrogance he was Dave Mackay and you didn't send him off. An intimidated referee let him off with a caution.

Contentious tackling... Derby's Mackay

My breakthrough thanks to Bastin

The Arsenal programme for the recent home match against West Ham United included several pages dealing with *Cliff Bastin Remembers*, the autobiography of the great Arsenal player which I, as a teenager of 17 and 18, ghosted.

The article told of how, being driven along the North Circular Road by my parents I noticed a sign "The Cliff Bastin Cafe". Although an unhappy articled clerk in a City solicitors' office, I'd already begun freelancing and wrote to him asking if I might help write his autobiography.

The upshot was that he agreed, which meant long Saturday hours in the British Museum Newspaper Library at Colindale and fascinating Sunday evenings in his flat above the cafe. For me it was an act of piety, a labour of love, but when it appeared in December 1950, it proved hugely controversial.

The book was widely and sometimes pungently reviewed; Cliff being in some quarters accused unfairly of conceit. The truth was he, with his incipient deafness, lived in something of a cocoon; properly convinced of his own abilities, but largely unaware of how his views might appear to others. Suddenly, surprisingly, I myself was on the map.

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Lovell soccer

eye witness

James Montague reports from Colombo & Thimphu

SRI LANKA & BHUTAN

The World Cup dream of FIFA's worst ranked team

For a city of 5.6 million people choked by a perennial mix of traffic, smog and noise, the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo was eerily and uncharacteristically silent and still.

The tuk tuk pottered through the city's empty streets towards the Sugathadasa Stadium as the sun began to set on another blisteringly hot day.

In a few days, the long road to the 2018 World Cup finals in Russia would begin here and in five other cities across Asia near simultaneously. Sri Lanka were due to play Bhutan, the world's lowest-ranked team according to FIFA. But the country's

Hope...coach Nima (in blue) with the Bhutan squad

excitement had been exhausted by another World Cup.

The streets of Colombo had emptied for a Cricket World Cup match between Sri Lanka, who won the competition in 1996, and Australia. Down side streets, groups of teenagers played impromptu street cricket, using upturned wooden boxes or plastic crates as wickets.

Sitting inside the deserted Sugathadasa Stadium, Nikola Kavazovic is well used to football taking a back seat to Sri Lanka's national game. He had been waiting for an interview with one of the few newspapers who had expressed an interest in the game. The journalist had yet to turn up. "This is the most important match ever for Sri Lanka," he said with a shake of his head. "I didn't expect people, fans or anyone ▸

At home...Bhutan players train at their national stadium before the second leg

Pictures: James Montague & Getty Images

else to support this national team. I was prepared that we would not have any support. Unfortunately I was right."

After a successful spell with Tajikistan, Kavazovic was appointed coach of Sri Lanka in 2014 and was charged by the country's football federation with taking the team past the first round of qualification, where 12 of Asia's lowest-ranked teams were drawn against each other in home and away ties.

The winners would qualify for a group stage and the chance of playing eight competitive matches against Asia's best teams – a bonanza for countries on the edges of the international game who can sometimes go a whole year without playing a meaningful match.

Being matched with Bhutan – an isolated kingdom in the Himalayas not only considered the worst team in the world by FIFA but also one playing its first-ever World Cup match – was considered as good as being handed a bye for many.

"Two matches against Bhutan and we can change the history of Sri Lankan football," states Kavazovic, although he had no illusions about qualifying for Russia. Reaching the group stage, not finishing last and improving Sri Lanka's chances of qualifying in future tournaments were more realistic goals.

"I told them once 'Boys, this is do or die'," he recalls. "If we win [against Bhutan] you are going to play against Dejagah, Honda, Cahill, a legend of Australian football. Otherwise you will only play the South Asian Cup [the South Asian Football

Away support...many of those at the first game were Bhutanese students

"I was prepared that we would not have any support. Unfortunately I was right"

Sri Lanka coach Nikola Kavazovic

Virtually empty... the World Cup venue in Sri Lanka

Birthday boy ...Sri Lanka striker Sanjeev

Federation Championship, played every two years]. And I think you are sick of South Asian Cup."

Kavazovic knew almost nothing about the Bhutan team aside from a few matches on YouTube. "Chencho is an excellent striker," he said of Chencho Gyeltshen, a raw, 18-year-old player who had played a few games for reigning Thai champions Buriram United. "He's the only guy I know."

The Serb coach had come in with a far stricter way of doing business than the Sri Lankans had been used to in the past. "Flexible communism. Everyone is equal. I'm the first against equals," he says when asked to describe his coaching style.

Earlier, the team's general manager had wondered how he was going to break the news to the coach, without getting his head ripped off, that the only way of getting to Bhutan now was via four flights over 24 hours. The tickets had yet to be booked and the match is less than a week away. "Sometimes they are afraid of my reactions because I'm Slav," he laughs. "My temperament is sometimes very bad."

But the Sri Lanka players didn't appear cowed or fearful, but rather relaxed and confident. After training the team presents a cake for one of the player's birthdays, their striker Sanjeev Shanmugarajah. As he approached he was squirted in the face with whipped cream, as others smeared chocolate cake over his face. "All countries dream of the World Cup," he says confidently through a wide smile, cake still smeared on his face. "We are planning a 4-0 score."

Meanwhile, Bhutan arrive a few days before the match in surprisingly good condition. In fact, Bhutan very nearly didn't take part in the qualifying competition at all. In December the Bhutan Football Federation had ruled out entering, preferring instead to use their small resources to improve their youth-training set-up.

On their way...Bhutan arriving in Sri Lanka

But early in the new year FIFA announced that $300,000 would be made available to help with the substantial cost of moving a national team around Asia for two matches. The Thai FA then offered their facilities for

training. The Bhutan team had spent a month in Bangkok acclimatising to the heat and humidity while playing practice matches against top Thai teams, even beating a few of them.

"A few of the boys were sick on the first day," said Bhutan's captain Kharma Shedrup Tshering of the intense first week of training. While almost all the other players were still asleep, he is sat in the team's hotel on Colombo's tropical seafront with the side's 45-year-old coach Chokey Nima.

Several of the players are outside of their own country for the very first time too, but Tshering is used to leaving Bhutan every week. As well as being the national captain, he is also a pilot for the national airline, Druk Air. "When we get back to Bhutan, next day I fly to Bangkok and back," he says. "Then we play Sri Lanka and then the next day I fly to Singapore. We have a shortage of pilots right now."

Bhutan is a landlocked country of three quarters of a million people in the eastern Himalayas that has been largely isolated from the rest of the world until now. Few flights land at its picturesque Paro Airport, and tourists have to pay a minimum $250 a day tariff each to stay in the country.

Television was banned until the late 1990s and older members of the federation, including Nima, remember those days before TV, when VHS cassettes of European Cup matches and World Cups were smuggled in. Nima played for the Bhutan national team for 12 years and was part of the side that lost 20-0 to Kuwait in an Asian Cup qualifier in 2000 – a world record defeat at the time. Bhutan conceded four penalties and had two red cards. "Spending 90 minutes on the pitch was pretty tough," he recalls. "We were not aware of tactics."

Shortly afterwards Bhutan joined FIFA, but it is television that has completely revolutionised the game. Nima believes that his players are better at almost every level than when he played. "At the individual level, the psychological, tactical and physical level," he says. "In football we see how things are done. We are much, much better than we were before. We have much more exposure to TV and experienced coaches."

Tshering can't remember a time before TV and adds: "The first match I remember was France 1998, so my favourite player was Zinedine Zidane. Television was a great influence for me. Television really helped me to play the way I do now."

Although results against professional league teams in Thailand had given Bhutan hope, the big test would come against Sri Lanka. But Tshering seemed put out that they had been dubbed the "worst team in the world", believing that their ranking was a false position.

"We have a lot of talent, but Bhutan is a very landlocked country and not very open to the media," he argues. "But if we do qualify it will help these young players to maybe move abroad. This game will go down in history."

And indeed it did. The Sugathadasa Stadium was virtually empty as the two national anthems were played. The Sri Lanka federation had hoped a few thousand would attend, but kick-off was arranged for 3pm on a workday, a ruse to give the team an advantage in the heat.

Once again cricket intervened, but not the World Cup this time. A famous school cricket match, the second oldest in the world, was starting that day and 30,000 fans were expected across town. Only a few hundred had arrived to see the national football team play, most of them Bhutanese students who had travelled from across the country to be there.

On the morning of the match the Bhutan team hotel was abuzz with comments from a former Sri Lanka captain that seemed to denigrate the visitors, and when the match began Bhutan came flying out of the blocks.

It was clear within a few moments that Bhutan were far better than their ranking suggested. Not only did they seem fitter in the sweltering afternoon heat that was supposed to give Sri Lanka a huge advantage, technically they had the upper

> "If we do qualify it will help these young players to move abroad. This game will go down in history"
> Bhutan captain Kharma Shedrup Tshering

Solid...Bhutan defender Man Bahadur Gurung (no2) clears

Blessed...Bhutan captain Tshering visits a monastery before the second leg

hand too. Chencho, the player picked out by Kavazovic before the game, terrorised Sri Lanka's defence with his pace, and although the first half ended goalless, both teams hit the woodwork.

Chances came and went in the second half as the two teams inevitably tired, but Bhutan always looked the more likely to score. And, with a few minutes left, they did exactly that.

Chencho flew down the wing, cut the ball back and midfielder Tshering Dorji scored the goal that secured Bhutan's first-ever World Cup victory. The players celebrated wildly on the pitch while the Sri Lanka players sullenly walked back to the dressing room as the result made headlines around the world.

Later that night, the team went to celebrate at KFC, where the total bill was

Return leg...hosts Bhutan (in orange) and Sri Lanka

$400. "There was too much chicken, I ordered a bucket for each player," Bhutan's general manager later recalls with regret. For the players who had never left the country it was their first taste of Western fast food. The next day the players gathered at Colombo Airport for the flight back to Bhutan via Bangkok. One of the players new to foreign travel tried to check two buckets of chicken in with his luggage.

When the Bhutan players landed in Paro, around 40km from the capital Thimphu, a welcoming party was waiting for them in traditional dress, holding banners and singing traditional songs. The players sang as the team bus rollicked around the mountain roads towards the national stadium.

The victory had transformed the narrative around the Bhutan national

team: from perennial hopeless losers they were now genuine possible victors and the next few days saw the country gripped by World Cup fever. Bhutan's one TV channel beamed wall-to-wall coverage of the team. The federation sold out of national team shirts. The players visited monasteries and received blessings from monks in what is a deeply Buddhist country. The squad settled back into their surroundings, 8,000ft above sea level, the thin air making the stunning Changlimithang Stadium the third highest in the world, and the highest outside of South America.

Conversely, Sri Lanka had endured a terrible journey, sleeping on benches at Indian airports. "The journey was very difficult, but we recovered fast," says Kavazovic outside his team hotel before the return game. "We are in a bad situation. We made a mess in Colombo but we now have to fix this mess."

Kavazovic said his players were feeling no ill effects of the altitude and were buoyed by the fact that the Chanlimithang Stadium had artificial turf. But he still had to take drastic measures to protect his players from the embarrassment of the first game. "I took all the mobile phones from the players so they can't read any comments," he explains. "But we can not be underdogs in this match. We are a better team than them."

The Bhutan government announced that all civil servants would get the afternoon off to watch the historic second leg World Cup qualification match. Entry to the stadium would be free too. The Chanlimithang Stadium was full an hour before kick off as the country braced itself for the biggest day in its modern history. A few hours beforehand, Bhutan's captain Kharma Shedrup Tshering visited a nearby monastery to be blessed by a monk, pray and throw divination dice. The numbers were good, he was told. He would be fresh for the game too. After the victory in Colombo, Druk Air had wisely given their pilot the rest of the week off.

By kick-off, as many as 30,000 people had filled every space inside and outside the stadium. With five minutes, it had erupted. Chencho had chased a hopeful long ball and somehow flicked it past the onrushing goalkeeper. Bhutan seemed on course for victory until Sri Lanka finally scored late in the first half. The game swung back and forth in the second with Chencho bursting through time and again. He had a goal disallowed before Sri Lanka hit the post with minutes left. A goal either way would have clinched progression. But, finally, the altitude told. A tiring Sri Lanka couldn't stop Chencho from weaving through its defence and firing home in the 90th minute.

Pride...Bhutan players line up for their national anthem

> "I can say, deep in my heart, I will cheer for Bhutan in the group stage"
> **Sri Lanka coach Kavazovic salutes the victors**

Almost every Bhutan player was in tears when the final whistle was blown. From the lowest-ranked team in the world, they had won two matches in a row. They had only won four in their entire history before.

And what of Sri Lanka? Coach Kavazovic visited the Bhutan dressing room and congratulated the home side. He asked for Chencho's shirt, the man, he joked, who just cost him his job.

"I can say, deep in my heart, I will cheer for Bhutan in the group stage," admits Kavazovic after the game, with the crowd still deafening in the background. "Look at the crowd. They deserve this. This country deserves it more."

Bhutan now move on to the group stage, where they will enjoy a huge advantage at home, in the altitude. "They heard The Dragon roar!" captain Kharma Tshering says on the pitch as the players celebrated around him.

But there would be no celebrations at KFC this time, as KFC doesn't exist in Bhutan. Nor any drinks. Tuesday had been designated a dry day by the government. Instead, the players and their families met in a local hotel to eat and to cry a little.

"It feels amazing, but I haven't thought about what happens next," said Tshering in the lobby.

"But maybe," he added, "it might help me get a girlfriend." WS

Agony and ecstasy... Bhutan snatch a late goal in the second leg

THE 500 MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS ON THE PLANET

Heroes, villains and future stars

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK #WS500

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Five hundred for the world to discuss...

How and why we selected the World Soccer 500

This is not intended to be a list of the "best" 500 players in the world. It's impossible to compare players from different leagues and continents; any list is inevitably subjective. We have endeavoured to compile a list of the world's most talked-about players – the most newsworthy players who, by definition, are the most important.

We started by drawing up a list of the key players by league – starting with 50 each for the leading leagues in Europe (England, Germany, Spain), 40 for France and Italy, between 15 and 25 for middle-ranking leagues, and ending with between five and 10 for smaller leagues. We then added players who were important figures for their national sides and in their respective regions.

We tried to include players who fell into five different catagories:

1 In-form players who have been making headlines in the 2014-15 season.

2 The young talents who have earned rave reviews in the past year.

3 The internationals who are key figures for their respective national sides.

4 The headline-makers who have made news for their actions off the pitch.

5 Those genuine world-class players who regularly feature in World XIs.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK #WS500

Reaching the final list of 500 was not an easy task. There are many players who missed the final cut but who came very close.

There were many omissions. For example, we included Steven Gerrard, who is expected to play a leading role in Liverpool's FA Cup challenge before heading to Los Angeles. But there was no place for Frank Lampard, whose substitute appearances for Manchester City have delayed his arrival at New York City FC, where David Villa is now the star attraction.

Thiago Alcantara, though injured, made the final list because he could well play an important role for Bayern Munich in the final, decisive weeks of the season. But Roma's Dutch midfielder Kevin Strootman, who will be sidelined until at least the end of the season, did not make the 500.

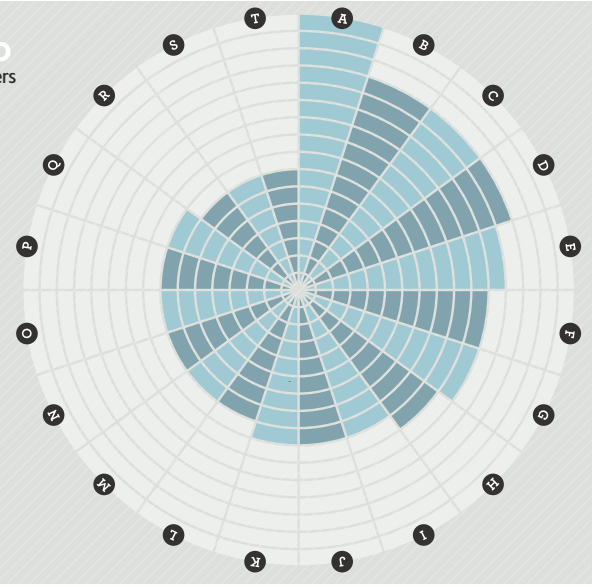
Join the debate about the WS500 at worldsoccer.com and #WS500.

Leading nation... Brazilians top the list

WS500 by club

Bayern Munich have the most players

a)	Bayern Munich	16
b)	Barcelona	13
c)	Chelsea	13
d)	Real Madrid	13
e)	Paris Saint-Germain	12
f)	Atletico Madrid	11
g)	Manchester City	11
h)	Manchester United	10
i)	Arsenal	9
j)	Porto	9
k)	Wolfsburg	9
l)	Borussia Dortmund	8
m)	Juventus	8
n)	Liverpool	8
o)	Marseille	8
p)	Monaco	8
q)	Roma	8
r)	Napoli	7
s)	Schalke	7
t)	Valencia	7



KEY

- **IN-FORM** Playing well in 2015
- **TALENT** Rising young star
- **INTERNATIONAL** Key figure for national side
- **STORY-MAKER** Making headlines off pitch
- **STAR QUALITY** World XI contender

WS500 by nationality

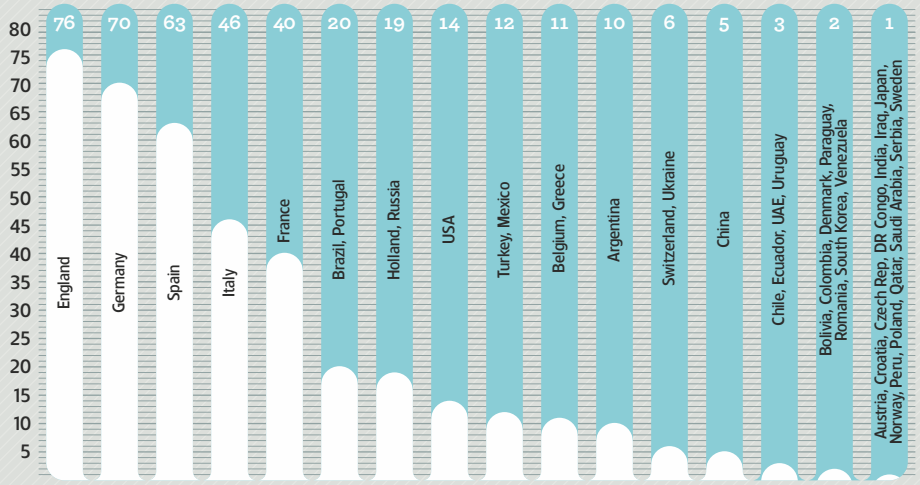
There are 54 Brazilians on the list

2 Iceland
20 Belgium
2 Norway
2 Sweden
4 Poland
1 Scotland
19 Holland
34 Germany
1 Czech Republic
16 England
4 Denmark
2 Romania
1 Finland
8 Russia
2 Ukraine
8 Serbia
30 France
44 Spain
5 Croatia
1 Bulgaria
1 Uzbekistan
1 North Korea
2 China
11 Portugal
6 Switzerland
24 Italy
8 Greece
5 Turkey
1 Iran
1 UAE
3 South Korea
6 Japan
3 Algeria
2 Slovenia
2 Egypt
1 Iraq
1 India
1 Burkina Faso
5 Nigeria
4 Austria
1 Albania
1 Israel
1 Qatar
1 Saudi Arabia
6 Ivory Coast
5 Cameroon
3 DR Congo
1 Gabon
1 Kenya
6 Ghana
4 Australia
1 South Africa
2 New Zealand

Top dogs...Premier League has the most players

WS500 by league

England's Premier League leads the way with 76 players, followed by the German Bundesliga and Spain's Liga



Omar ABDULRAHMAN

Age 23, Al Ain & UAE

West Asia has yet to produce a really global star player. There have, of course, been hugely talented continental figures such as Ali Daei of Iran and Saudi Arabia's Sami Al Jaber, but they both struggled to win worldwide fame and acclaim. Omar Abdulrahman, however, has the talent to become the first to make his mark on the world stage; the only issue is whether he wants to.

The United Arab Emirates playmaker is the hottest property on the world's biggest continent. All manner of heavyweight clubs are interested in him, and articles asking when, where and even if he will go to Europe have been common in the Dubai and Abu Dhabi sports press since he burst on to the scene.

For those outside the country, that happened at the 2012 London Olympics when he was just 20 and running the game – the first half anyway – against Uruguay. His passing, vision and carefree creativity that day at Old Trafford had him back in Manchester soon after as City gave him a trial. He impressed but did not yet want to leave home and Al Ain.

His club side are one of the best in west Asia, winning the inaugural Asian Champions League in 2003 and reaching the Final in 2005. He joined the club's youth set-up after arriving in the UAE from Saudi Arabia, where he was born to parents of Yemeni descent. Under coaches such as Toninho Cerezo and Jorge Fossati, he has developed into a top-class attacking midfielder.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK #WS500

He also starred at this year's Asian Cup in Australia, where local fans had an inkling he was special – and so it proved. In the very first seconds of the opening game, against Qatar, he floated a perfect pass that almost produced a goal. It didn't matter. The game ended with UAE winning 4-1 and "Amoory" was sublime.

There are a few critics who question his lack of defensive work, but that's not much of a problem given the quality of his attacking output. There are,

however, more genuine concerns over the fragile state of his knees.

Many think Spain and not England should be his next stage and he has made recent comments about wanting a European move. But that is not always easy in west Asia, where clubs and owners can refuse to let stars leave or the players themselves prefer to stay in their comfort zone. Fears that Abdulrahman may stay home were heightened by a new contract deal in February.

Even if he and Al Ain are willing, his hefty salary and other perks could deter European clubs from taking a player from a part of the world not known for exporting talent. But it really would not be a gamble. Omar Abdulrahman has what it takes to be a global name.

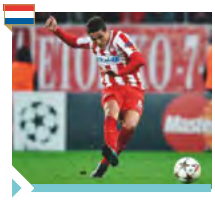
John Duerden

Vincent ABOUBAKAR
Age 23, Porto (Por) & Cameroon

Striker who moved to Portugal this summer. Combines pace and physicality with neat technical ability.

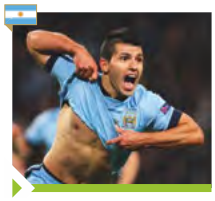
Aritz ADURIZ
Age 34, Athletic Bilbao & Spain

Veteran Basque centre-forward in terrific goalscoring form in his third spell in Bilbao, typified by his recent winner against Real Madrid.



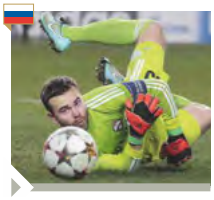
Ibrahim AFELLAY
Age 28, Olympiakos (Gre) & Holland

Winger who is rebuilding his career on loan in Greece after a knee injury curtailed his impact at Barcelona.



Sergio AGUERO
Age 26, Manchester City (Eng) & Argentina

Brilliant attacker whose goals have been crucial to City's Premier League success but who has been troubled by injury.



Igor AKINFEEV
Age 28, CSKA Moscow & Russia

Key figure for club and country since breaking through as a teen more than a decade ago. Mistakes at the World Cup were blamed on a laser pointer.

Nasser AL SHAMRANI
Age 31, Al Hilal & Saudi Arabia

The 2014 Asian Footballer of the Year, despite being sent off in the AFC Champions League Final for butting and spitting at an opponent.

David ALABA
Age 22, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Austria

Austria's youngest international and a veteran at 22. Versatile left-back and free-kick maestro who plays in midfield for his country.

Jordi ALBA
Age 26, Barcelona & Spain

Attacking left-back with considerable pace and powers of recovery who has been consistently excellent for Barca since switching from Valencia in 2012.

Paco ALCACER
Age 21, Valencia & Spain

Striker who has played his way into the senior Spain side since last summer's World Cup with a spate of goals to help his club's quest for a European spot.

ALEX SANDRO
Age 24, Porto (Por) & Brazil

In the best traditions of Brazilian rampaging full-backs. Moved to Portugal in 2011 and is being watched by a number of top European clubs.

ALEX TEIXEIRA
Age 25, Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) & Brazil

Attacking midfielder who is the latest Brazilian to emerge at Shakhtar. Has played for his country at junior level.

Osvaldo ALONSO
Age 29, Seattle Sounders (USA) & Cuba

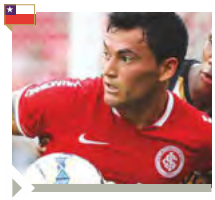
Cuban-born midfielder who defected to the USA at the 2007 Gold Cup. Speculation is growing that he could play for the US.

ANDERSON
Age 26, Internacional & Brazil

A left-footed midfielder whose potential has been undermined by injuries and a lack of focus. Were his new club reckless in offering a four-year contract?

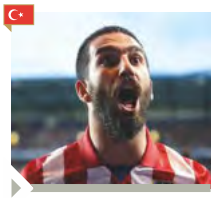
ANDRE ANDRE
Age 25, Vitoria Guimaraes & Portugal

Goalscoring midfielder who has been one of the stars of Guimaraes' impressive season. Joined from Varzim three seasons ago.



Charles ARANGUIZ
Age 25, Internacional (Bra) & Chile

Product of the Cobreola academy in his native land. The dynamic midfielder is a stalwart for club and country.

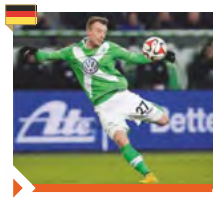


ARDA Turan
Age 28, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & Turkey

Attacking midfielder and captain of his national side, he was also a key performer in Atletico's league triumph last season.

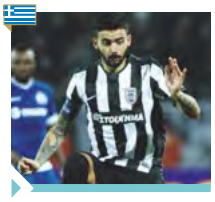
ARI
Age 29, Krasnodar (Rus) & Brazil

A regular scorer in the Russian league after spells in Sweden and Holland. In talks about taking Russian citizenship.



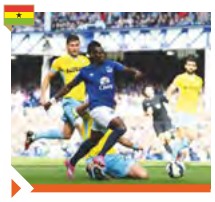
Maximilian ARNOLD
Age 20, Wolfsburg & Germany

Goalscoring midfielder who is excelling for Bundesliga high-flyers Wolfsburg. In Germany's pre-World Cup squad but missed final cut.



Stefanos ATHANASIADIS
Age 26, PAOK & Greece

In fine goalscoring form for PAOK in this season's Europa League, including an 18-minute hat-trick against Dinamo Minsk.

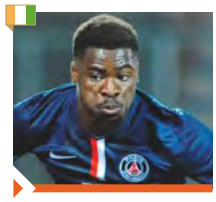


Christian ATSU
Age 23, Everton (Eng) & Ghana

Winger who is on loan at Goodison Park from Chelsea. Was in outstanding form as Ghana reached the African Nations Cup Final in February.

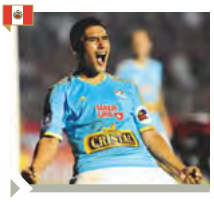
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG
Age 25, Borussia Dortmund (Ger) & Gabon

Striker or wide attacker, one of African football's leading forwards. Has found his feet at Dortmund this season.



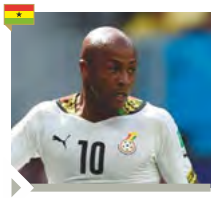
Serge AURIER
Age 22, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Ivory Coast

Attacking right-back for the African champions. His loan from Toulouse is seen as a bid by PSG to get round Financal Fairplay regulations.



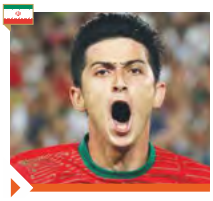
Irwin AVILA
Age 24, Sporting Cristal & Peru

Nippy little striker who played a major part in his club's league titles of 2012 and 2014. The jury is still out on whether he can tip the balance for his country.



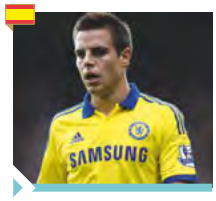
Andre AYEW
Age 25, Marseille (Fra) & Ghana

Leading striker for club and country who led Ghana to the 2015 African Nations Cup Final. The son of legendary Ghana forward Abedi Pele.



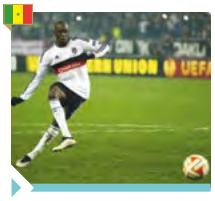
Sardar AZMOUN
Age 20, Rostov (Rus) & Iran

Iran's young player of the year, making waves in the Russian league, and who impressed at the recent Asian Cup. On loan from Rubin Kazan.



Cesar AZPILICUETA
Age 25, Chelsea (Eng) & Spain

Versatile defender who displaced Ashley Cole as Chelsea's first-choice left-back. Has represented his country from under-16 upwards.



Demba BA
Age 29, Besiktas (Tur) & Senegal

French-born Senegalese striker who is enjoying a prolific first season in Turkey after being sold by Chelsea last summer.

Carlos BACCA
Age 28, Sevilla (Spa) & Colombia

Striker on song for Sevilla. Late starter who worked as a bus conductor and sold fish before Colombian top-flight debut at 23.

Daniel BAIER
Age 30, Augsburg & Germany

Stocky midfielder who has been crucial to Augburg's survival and subsequent progress in the Bundesliga. A former under-21 international.

Gareth BALE
Age 25, Real Madrid (Spa) & Wales

Capped his first season in Madrid with a goal in the Champions League Final, but the target of angry fans this term fors poor performances.

Mario BALOTELLI
Age 24, Liverpool (Eng) & Italy

Eternally troublesome striker whose off-pitch antics have detracted from his footballing abilities. A move back to Italy in the summer looks in the offing.

Abdul Rahman BABA

Age 20, Augsburg (Ger) & Ghana

It speaks volumes for Augsburg's Ghanaian international Abdul Rahman Baba that he is currently among the top three left-backs in the Bundesliga; not quite at the level of Bayern's David Alaba but definitely level-pegging with Wolfsburg's highly rated Ricardo Rodriguez.

Of all the roles in the modern game, few are as taxing and multi-dimensional as that of the attacking full-back. And whether bursting forward on the overlap, putting in good quality crosses, biting into the tackle, or providing cover and maintaining tactical discipline, the 20-year-old from the northern Ghanaian city of Tamale does a fine job in all areas.

As he proved early this year with a string of first-class displays for the runners-up at the African Nations Cup, this softly spoken young man turns into a competitive beast on the field. Throughout the finals, he was a constant source of stamina, dynamism, technique and conviction.

After an excellent apprenticeship back home in Ghana – initially at the talent-spotting factory of Dreams FC in the Madina suburb of the capital Accra, then on loan at national institution Asante Kotoko – Baba first came to Europe in the summer of 2012 when joining newly promoted Bundesliga side Greuther Furth. Despite being sent off on his debut in the German Cup, experiencing a few afternoons in wingers' slipstreams and tasting relegation at the end of the campaign, he at least shaved off a layer or two of naivety and performed sufficiently consistently to hold down a regular first-team spot in the second half of the season.

He continued to hone his craft in the second division for the following campaign, and not long after ending up on the losing side in a promotion play-off against Hamburg he was bought for €2.5million by top-flight upstarts Augsburg. It was piece of business which, on the evidence of his barnstorming work for the Bavarians this term, has the air of a heist.

Providing plenty of attacking support without falling into the trap of blindly charging forward or trying to dribble past one opponent too many, Baba has in no time at all become an integral part of the Augsburg "all for one, one for all" system. There are reports that the likes of Dortmund, Roma and certain Premier League clubs are hovering.

"Augsburg encourages young players to improve and maximise their potential," says Baba, a member of the Ghana side which finished third at the 2013 Under-20 World Cup. "Coming here was absolutely the right decision."

Nick Bidwell

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK
#WS500

Ross BARKLEY
Age 21, Everton & England

One of the great white hopes of English football. The midfielder has come through the Everton ranks but may have to move clubs to fulfil his potential.

Augusto BATALLA
Age 18, River Plate & Argentina

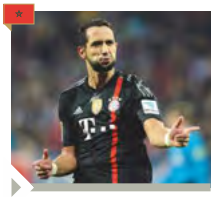
Highly-rated keeper who starred at the South American Under-20s. Linked with a move to Real Madrid as Iker Casillas' long-term replacement.

Claudio BEAUVUE
Age 26, Guingamp & France

Late-developing Guadaloupe-born midfielder turned forward who scored 11 goals in a run of 15 games earlier this season.

Karim BELLARABI
Age 24, Bayer Leverkusen & Germany

Winger who scored the Bundesliga's fastest-ever goal after nine seconds against Dortmund last August. Called up by Germany in October.



Mehdi BENATIA
Age 27, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Morocco

Central defender and one of the most wanted in last summer's transfer market but has yet to match his Roma form.

Lars BENDER
Age 25, Bayer Leverkusen & Germany

Hard-working, tactically astute midfielder or right-back, missed the 2014 World Cup through injury. Twin of Dortmund's Sven.

Dario BENEDETTO
Age 24, America (Mex) & Argentina

Forward whose transfer from Tijuana to champions America was the biggest domestic story of the winter in Mexico.

Nabil BENTALEB
Age 20, Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) & Algeria

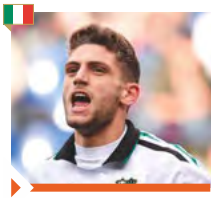
Young central midfielder who has become a regular for club and country this season. Born in France to Algerian parents.

Karim BENZEMA
Age 27, Real Madrid (Spa) & France

Born to Algerian parents, he has made the central striking role at Real his own, despite Ronaldo's preference for the position.

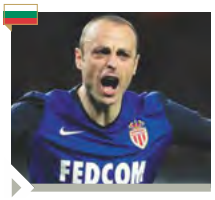
Saido BERAHINO
Age 21, West Brom & England

Burundi-born forward who came to England as a 10-year-old asylum seeker. Hugely talented but manager Tony Pulis has warned of off-field distractions.



Domenico BERARDI
Age 20, Sassuolo & Italy

Quick-witted striker tipped for a big future. On loan at Sassuolo from Italian champions Juventus, but surely due for a recall soon.



Dimitar BERBATOV
Age 34, Monaco (Fra) & Bulgaria

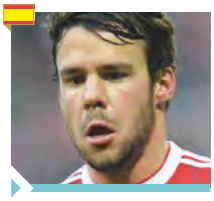
The veteran Bulgarian centre-forward is enjoying a last hurrah in Monte Carlo amid talk of a return to the international fold.

Vasili BEREZUTSKI
Age 32, CSKA Moscow & Russia

Defensive mainstay of the Russian national team and CSKA for more than a decade. Often plays alongside his identical twin Aleksei.

BERNARDO SILVA
Age 20, Monaco (Fra) & Portugal

Quick-footed attacker who slipped through Benfica's net but benefited from agent Jorge Mendes' connections at Monaco.



Juan BERNAT
Age 22, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Spain

Left-back or wide midfielder who is one of the growing Spanish legion at Bayern. Made his international debut in October.

Lucas BIGLIA
Age 29, Lazio (Ita) & Argentina

Midfield enforcer who came into Argentina's starting line-up for the knockout stages of the 2014 World Cup. Has Italian roots through his grandmother.

DANILO

Age 23, Porto (Por) & Brazil

Under the shrewd stewardship of club president Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa, Porto have excelled at bringing in young talent, polishing them for a while, then selling for a big profit. In a few months' time, the Dragons are likely to be completing the same lucrative process with right-back Danilo.

Bought from Pele's old club Santos three years ago for € 13million, Danilo Luiz da Silva – to give him his full name – has since developed into one of the most in-demand players in Europe. He is on the shopping list of the likes of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester United, and when he does move on, Porto will at least double their initial outlay.

Only last year it was widely reported that a deal

was in the pipeline for him to join Barcelona as the long-term replacement for the supposedly past-his-prime Dani Alves. But Barca's 12-month transfer ban for breaching FIFA rules relating to the acquisition of minors – not to mention the upheaval caused by the sacking of director of sport Andoni Zubizarreta – put paid to that. And if Portuguese sports daily *A Bola* is to be believed, Real Madrid have now struck a €30m deal to take him to the Bernabeu.

That the creme de la creme of Europe have been beating a path to his agent's door is no surprise. In two-and-a-half seasons in Porto's first-team he has improved by leaps and bounds and now is the complete full-back package, exceptional going forward, full of creativity, purpose and stamina, hard-working, combative and tough to beat one on one.

A Sao Paulo state and South American champion with Santos, his finesse on the ball and pinpoint crosses ought to serve him very well indeed at Real and so will his flair for goalscoring. Last season, for example, he was on the scoresheet six times in the Portuguese championship and Champions League. At Santos he revealed a flair for vital goals at important moments, netting in the second leg of the 2011 Libertadores Cup Final against Penarol and also curling in a long-distance free-kick later that year in a World Club Cup semi-final versus Kashiwa Reysol of Japan.

For most of his 18 months with Santos – who he joined from Atletico Mineiro in May 2010 – he was something of an unsung hero whose qualities often went unnoticed by fans and media. But thanks in no small part to those goals, he at last received the recognition he deserved, thus putting himself in the shop window for that all-important move to Europe.

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"These were goals which consolidated my day-to-day work on the training ground and made me more visible," says Danilo. "All-round performances are more important, but there's no doubt a goal on a big occasion sends your name out to the world."

Unlucky to be left out of Brazil's 2014 World Cup squad, but now back in the fold under Dunga, he has every chance of being part of the *Selecao* furniture for a long time to come. "He's a force of nature," says Dunga. "On the field he plays with vast amounts of energy and such commitment rubs off on his team-mates. He's in a very impressive phase of his career right now."

Nick Bidwell

Gustavo BOU

Age 25, Racing & Argentina

Gustavo Bou is a late bloomer and a player whose career path appeared to be that of the majority of young hopefuls – which is to say, one that does not end with a lucrative contract playing for a top European side but, instead, a journeyman's career with middle-to-lower-tier sides.

Bou began as a River Plate youth-team player, moving from his home town in the north of Argentina at the age of 14. His mother supported his ambition and it was remembering her words of encouragement, after she died the following year, that persuaded him to stick at a career in the game.

Diego Simeone handed the striker his debut in 2008, but he failed to settle in the first team. He also failed to find the net on a regular basis, managing just three goals in 32 appearances. Over the course of four seasons he was on the sidelines while the "*Millonarios*" continued to produce world-class talent and sell the likes of Radamel Falcao, Erik Lamela, Roberto Pereyra and Lucas Ocampos to European sides for tens of millions of pounds.

Bou, meanwhile, was loaned out to second-tier Olimpo in Argentina, then to Liga de Quito in Ecuador and finally to Gimnasia de La Plata. Three years of loan spells hardly helped his development, but his scoring record – under a goal every five games – did not warrant a top club taking a gamble on him.

Yet that is exactly what Racing did under new boss Diego Cocca, who signed Bou in August 2014. The striker arrived on a free transfer after River had released him and Racing fans were unimpressed, expecting yet another season of suffering based on the perceived quality of their new player.

But the season ended with a first league title in over a decade and Bou was top scorer, shining alongside Diego Milito in attack. He broke down in tears in front of the television cameras during celebrations when he remembered his mother who urged him to pursue his dream.

By late February, boosted by a Libertadores Cup hat-trick, his scoring rate was up to almost a goal per game. And he was not just the lucky beneficiary of great service. Because while he scored tap-ins, his repertoire also included mazy runs into the area and skilful finishes, headers and even direct free-kicks.

His consistency in front of goal with Racing launched him into the public eye and has led to his name being mentioned as a possible call-up to the national team. It may be something of a push to expect him to break into a squad which is top heavy with world-class attacking quality, but if he maintains his form then Gerardo Martino could be swayed.

And all the while, his perseverance and effort hold him up as a role model for talented teenagers across the country struggling to get their break in the first team.

Joel Richards

Cuauhtemoc BLANCO
Age 42, Puebla & Mexico

One of Mexico's greatest players, he is still active, though he will retire at the end of this season to pursue a political career.

Daley BLIND
Age 25, Manchester Utd (Eng) & Holland

Flexible, Ajax-schooled defender or midfielder central to Louis Van Gaal's "philosophy" at United. Son of former Ajax captain Danny.

Jerome BOATENG
Age 26, Bayern Munich & Germany

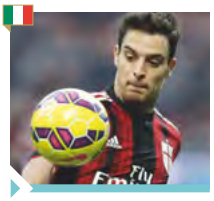
Struggled in a season at Manchester City but is now first choice for club and country. Half-brother of Ghana's Kevin-Prince.

Miller BOLANOS
Age 24, Emelec & Ecuador

Quick, strong striker who exploded last year as the best player in Ecuador and has been racking up the goals in international club competitions.

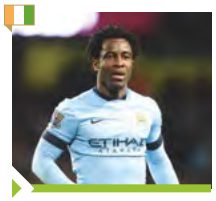
Yannick BOLASIE
Age 25, Crystal Palace (Eng) & DR Congo

French-born winger with electric feet and unpredictable skills. Plays a more central attacking role for DR Congo.



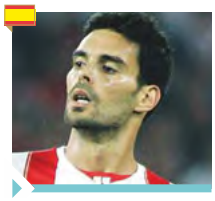
Giacomo BONAVENTURA
Age 25, Milan & Italy

Attacking midfielder with a habit of scoring spectacular goals. Enjoying a first season at Milan after moving from Atalanta.



Wilfried BONY
Age 26, Manchester City (Eng) & Ivory Coast

Powerful striker who was prolific at Vitesse and Swansea City but now has to be content with a place on the Manchester City bench.



Alberto BOTIA
Age 26, Olympiakos (Gre) & Spain

Centre-back and former Barcelona trainee. Had spells with Sporting Gijon, Sevilla and Elche before moving to Greece last summer.

John BOYE
Age 27, Erciyesspor (Tur) & Ghana

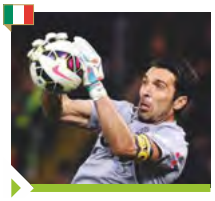
Versatile defender or defensive midfielder and key figure for Ghana after impressive displays at the 2015 African Nations Cup.

Michael BRADLEY
Age 27, Toronto & USA

Combative midfielder and one of the big earners in Toronto, whose offer lured him back from Serie A. Son of former USA national coach Bob.

Yacine BRAHIMI
Age 25, Porto (Por) & Algeria

Winger tipped for stardom. Played for France at youth level before switching to Algeria and was superb in their run to the World Cup last eight.



Gianluigi BUFFON
Age 37, Juventus & Italy

Italy's most-capped player shows no sign of slowing down despite recently racking up 500 appearances for the Serie A champions Juve.

BURAK Yilmaz
Age 29, Galatasaray & Turkey

Began his career in midfield but became a bullish striker for club and country, a regular Champions League scorer and often linked with a move abroad.

Sergio BUSQUETS
Age 26, Barcelona & Spain

Tactically astute defensive midfielder and the linchpin of the Barcelona engine room. Son of former Barca goalkeeper Carles Busquets.

Tim CAHILL
Age 35, Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) & Australia

Veteran goalscoring midfielder who recently made the pioneering switch to China after three seasons with New York Red Bulls.

Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA

Age 20, Cruzeiro (Bra) & Uruguay

Cruzeiro's recent acquisition of this talented playmaker highlights two apparently contradictory aspects of the contemporary Brazilian game.

One is the financial advantage it has over its continental rivals, with the consequence that high-profile players from elsewhere in South America are increasingly heading to Brazil. The other is that, with the economy slowing down and the government taking a harder line on debt, there is not as much money around as there used to be.

Cruzeiro, therefore, can afford to buy De Arrascaeta, but the side that won the last two Brazilian league titles has been broken up.

While losing central midfielder Lucas Silva to Real Madrid might be seen as normal, the departures of Everton Ribeiro (Al Ahli, UAE) and Ricardo Goulart (Guangzhou Evergrande, China) came out of the blue. Consequently, De Arrascaeta has been thrown in at the deep end. Instead of being eased into a settled, successful side, he is expected to walk straight in and impose himself. Goalless draws in Cruzeiro's first two Libertadores Cup games demonstrated this might not prove an easy task.

The good news, though, is that this is a player who has spent the last few years showing consistent improvement. At the start of 2013 he was a squad member in the South American Under-20 Championship. A few months later he was one of the best players in a team that lost in the Final of the Under-20 World Cup. He then established himself at senior level with Defensor in the Uruguayan top flight, and in 2014 went all the way to the semi-finals of the Libertadores with the tiny Montevideo-based team. De Arrascaeta was one of the stars of the competition and tore Cruzeiro to pieces in the group phase.

Some in Uruguay pushed for his inclusion in the World Cup squad, but that was premature. National coach Oscar Tabarez has used him

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sparingly: he came off the bench in South Korea in September last year and set up the only goal of the game. This year's Copa America should see him push his claims for inclusion in the next set of World Cup qualifiers.

Much, however, may rest on him maintaining the momentum in his new surroundings. His virtues are obvious: quick feet, a good range of passing, capacity to get into the box and score, and an ability to give and receive the ball on the turn. But Cruzeiro are far bigger than Defensor, with much higher expectations. Domestically they can hardly better their success of the past two years – which means right from the start the pressure is on the Uruguayan to justify his signing with high-class displays in the Libertadores.

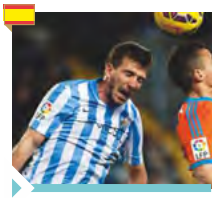
Tim Vickery

Hakan CALHANOGLU
Age 21, Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) & Turkey

Attacking midfielder who is living up to his £11m valuation. Born in Germany but has played for Turkey at all levels.

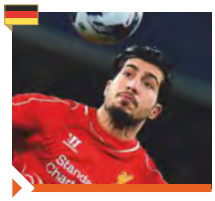
Jose CALLEJON
Age 28, Napoli (Ita) & Spain

Forward who has thrived in Italy after arriving in 2013 from Real Madrid where his chances were limited. Has featured in Spain's post-World Cup squad.



Ignacio CAMACHO
Age 24, Malaga & Spain

Defensive midfielder who has broken into the Spain squad this season and been linked with a move to a Champions League club.

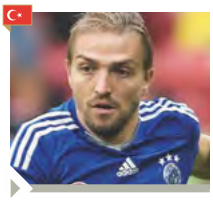


Emre CAN
Age 21, Liverpool (Eng) & Germany

Versatile midfielder whose switch to defence has coincided with Liverpool's upsurge in form. German-born of Turkish heritage.

Antonio CANDREVA
Age 28, Lazio & Italy

Dynamic right-sided midfielder who has been a key attacking weapon for the *Azzurri*. Quick and versatile, he is Lazio's most valuable asset.

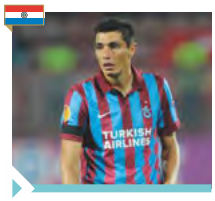


CANER Erkin
Age 26, Fenerbahce & Turkey

Left-back who is in fine form since returning to Turkey after a disappointing year in Russia with CSKA Moscow. Capped from under-17 to senior level.

Hector CANTEROS
Age 25, Flamengo (Bra) & Argentina

Central midfielder who, after being signed from Velez Sarsfield last year, did much to haul Brazil's biggest club out of relegation danger.

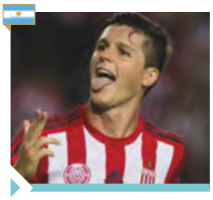


Oscar CARDOZO
Age 31, Trabzonspor (Tur) & Paraguay

Striker in fine goalscoring form in Turkey following a summer move from Benfica where he spent seven prolific years.

CARLOS EDUARDO
Age 25, Nice (Fra) & Brazil

Midfielder who is turning in some fine performances on loan from Porto, including five goals in one game against Guingamp.



Guido CARRILLO
Age 23, Estudiantes & Argentina

Striker whose form in the early stages of the Libertadores Cup could provide the springboard for a European move.

William CARVALHO
Age 22, Sporting Lisbon & Portugal

The latest potentially world-class midfield talent from Sporting's Alcochete academy set for a big-money move.

CASEMIRO
Age 23, Porto (Por) & Brazil

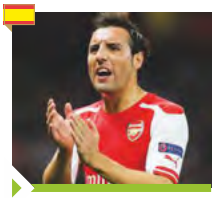
Central midfielder who is impressing on loan in Portugal after limited appearances at Real Madrid following a move from Santos in 2013.

Iker CASILLAS
Age 33, Real Madrid & Spain

The veteran keeper who has won everything with club and country is back in situ at the Bernabeu after losing his place last season.

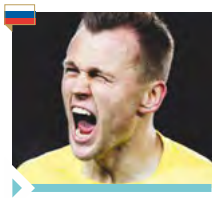
Edinson CAVANI
Age 28, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Uruguay

Box-to-box striker, a foil for Ibrahimovic (club) and Suarez (country). Linked with a move after a fallout with coach Laurent Blanc.



Santi CAZORLA
Age 30, Arsenal (Eng) & Spain

Experienced Spain international. Known as a winger or attacking midfielder but has excelled for Arsenal this season in a deeper role.

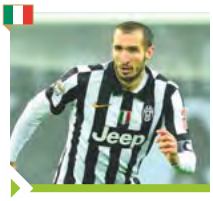


Denis CHERYSHEV
Age 24, Villarreal (Spa) & Russia

Versatile attacker impressing for Villarreal, but could return to parent club Real Madrid. Father Dmitri played for Sporting Gijon.

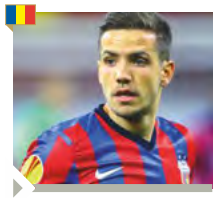
Sunil CHHETRI
Age 30, Bengaluru & India

India's captain and record goalscorer. Did not take part in the recent Indian Super League because he was contracted to the rival I-League.



Giorgio CHIELLINI
Age 30, Juventus & Italy

Left-sided central defender and no-nonsense organiser of Juventus' backline. The "other man" in the Luis Suarez biting incident at the World Cup.



Alexandru CHIPCIU
Age 25, Steaua Bucharest & Romania

Key attacking figure for Romania's biggest club and set to play a big role in the Euro 2016 qualifiers.

Eric-Maxim CHOUPO-MOTING
Age 26, Schalke (Ger) & Cameroon

German-born under-21 striker who opted to play for Cameroon at senior level. Arrived at Schalke from Mainz.

CICINHO
Age 34, Sivasspor (Tur) & Brazil

Veteran full-back who has enjoyed an Indian summer in Turkey, playing for former Real Madrid team-mate Roberto Carlos until he stepped down.

Jasper CILLESSEN
Age 25, Ajax & Holland

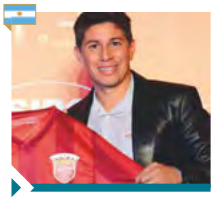
Calm, reliable keeper. Holland's first-choice at the World Cup, apart from in the shoot-out against Costa Rica, when he was replaced by Tim Krul.

Jordy CLASIE
Age 23, Feyenoord & Holland

Diminutive midfielder, once considered too small to play professional football, now captain of Feyenoord. Holland Under-21 international.

Kingsley COMAN
Age 18, Juventus (Ita) & France

Midfield prospect who joined Juventus last summer after his contract with Paris Saint-Germain expired – raising comparisons with Paul Pogba.



Dario CONCA
Age 31, Shanghai SIPG (Chn) & Argentina

Twice voted player of the year in the Brazilian championship but opted to earn millions in China rather than try his luck in Europe.

Kevin CONSTANT
Age 27, Trabzonspor (Tur) & Guinea

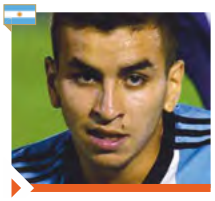
Walked off last season in protest at racist fans while playing for Milan. French-born, capped at under-17 level, but now plays for Guinea.

Ante CORIC
Age 17, Dinamo Zagreb & Croatia

Midfield wonderkid hailed as the next big thing in Croatia. Capped at under-21 level and Bayern Munich are said to be keen on him.

Jesus CORONA
Age 22, Twente (Hol) & Mexico

Highly rated winger who made his international debut in November, against Holland, having moved to Europe from Monterrey in 2013.



Angel CORREA
Age 20, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & Argentina

Star of the South American Under-20 championship. His progress at Atletico has been held up by a heart condition.

Diego COSTA
Age 26, Chelsea (Eng) & Spain

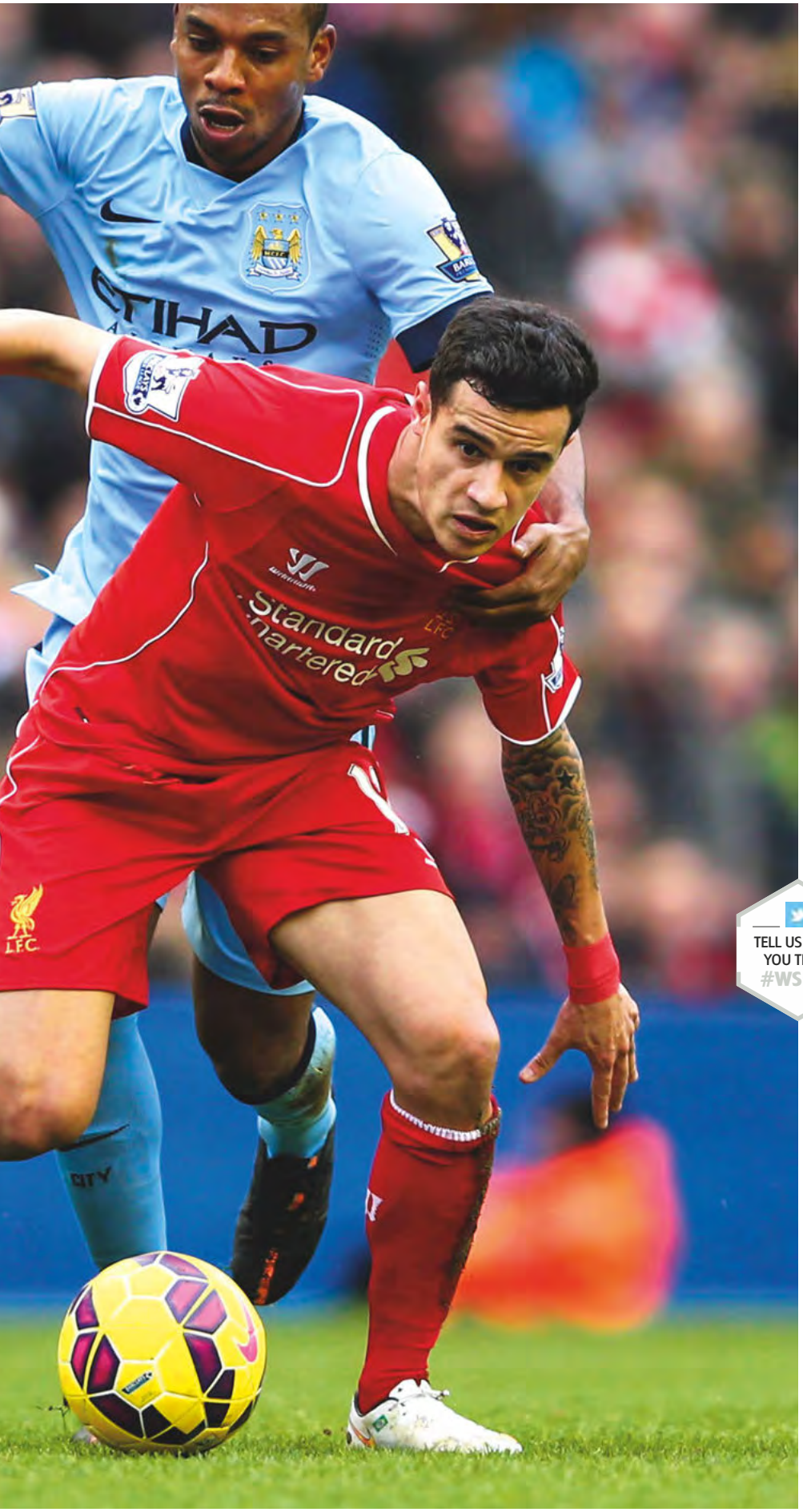
Rumbustious striker who has spearheaded Chelsea's challenge this season. Had eight clubs in Spain and Portugal before moving to England.

Thibaut COURTOIS
Age 22, Chelsea (Eng) & Belgium

Arguably the world's top keeper after three successful seasons on loan at Atletico Madrid. From a family of volleyball players.

Juan CUADRADO
Age 26 Chelsea (Eng) & Colombia

Speedy winger and a star of Colombia's run to the 2014 World Cup quarter-finals. Must now live up to his £27m pricetag.



Philippe COUTINHO

Age 22, Liverpool (Eng) & Brazil

The first three months of 2015 proved very fruitful for Philippe Coutinho, culminating in a place in Dunga's Brazil squad for friendlies against France and Chile. For a player who has slipped on and off football's international radar since emerging as a 16-year-old with Vasco da Gama, the call-up was recognition of some sparking performances in England.

After a first season at Liverpool when he was a sideshow to the main attraction of Luis Suarez, Coutinho's second campaign has seen him take centre stage, scoring spectacular goals as his side set their sights on the FA Cup and a top four place in the Premier League.

Many were sceptical when he made the switch from Italy to Merseyside. He had arrived at his previous club, Internazionale, with a glittering reputation following his performances for Brazil's under-17 side. Inter had paid a hefty fee and waited patiently for him to turn 18. But the teenager struggled to adapt to life in Serie A, especially when Rafa Benitez was relieved of his coaching duties, and Coutinho went out on loan to Spanish side Espanyol.

So far, so predictable for a player who had appeared for Brazil at under-20 level but was never recognised as one of the team's real stars.

It took the departure of Suarez – and a change of formation from Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers – to kick-start the Brazilian's career. The switch to a back three, midfield four and two attacking midfielders behind a lone striker (see Tactics, page 96) has given Coutinho a stage on which his skills have flourished.

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"He offers that gold dust to how we play. He's a wonderful player," says Rodgers. "If you see his videos on YouTube – playing futsal when he was 11 or 12 in Brazil – he's playing the same game now only as an adult.

"We knew he had ability, it was just about trusting that ability and allowing it to grow."

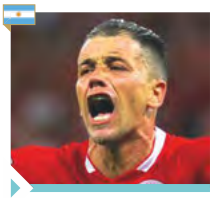
It remains to be seen whether Dunga is prepared to make similar tactical alterations to accommodate him. Can a place be found for Coutinho in a side where his natural position is already occupied by Neymar, who is Dunga's captain since the coach returned for a second stint following last summer's World Cup?

Dunga could play Coutinho on the left, which frees Neymar to roam across the line, but he has so far preferred Oscar, who offers more defensively. Alternatively, Coutinho could play alongside Neymar in place of centre-forward Tardelli. But has Dunga been studying this alternative? He told a Brazilian TV station that Liverpool play a 4-4-2 system – an error for which he was much criticised, and which would suggest he has not been following Coutinho that closely.

John Holmesdale

Moanes DABOUR
Age 22, Grasshoppers (Swi) & Israel

A leading striker in the Swiss league and a figurehead for a new wave of Israeli-Arab players. Made his Israel senior debut last year.



Andres D'ALESSANDRO
Age 33, Internacional (Bra) & Argentina

Impish playmaker, now an idol in Brazil. Made his name with River Plate and spent several years in Europe.

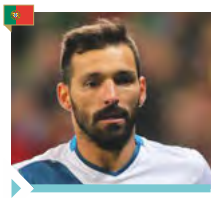
Jurgen DAMM
Age 22, Pachuca & Mexico

The Mexican league's best player so far this season. Had a trial with Manchester United and likely to move to Europe as soon as he has an EU passport.

DANI ALVES
Age 31, Barcelona (Spa) & Brazil

Star full-back for six seasons but Barca are stalling on a new deal.

PROFILED
DANILO
ON PAGE 38



DANNY
Age 31, Zenit (Rus) & Portugal

Attacking midfielder who is captain of Europa League contenders Zenit. Has now spent a decade in the Russian league.

Matteo DARMIAN
Age 25, Torino (Ita) & Italy

Attacking right-back who emerged at international level last season and has impressed in Torino's Europa League run.

PROFILED
GIORGIAN DE ARRASCAETA
ON PAGE 42

Kevin DE BRUYNE
Age 23, Wolfsburg (Ger) & Belgium

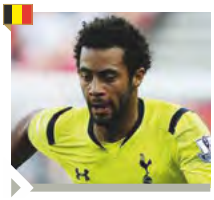
Midfielder flourishing in the Bundesliga since moving from Chelsea in January.

Daniele DE ROSSI
Age 31, Roma & Italy

The highest-paid player in Serie A with 100 caps for Italy. Midfielder who has remained loyal to Roma despite speculation of a move to England.

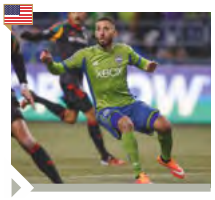
Steven DEFOUR
Age 26, Anderlecht & Belgium

Feisty midfielder who made a controversial return to Belgium from Porto last summer, angering fans of his former club, Standard Liege.



Mousa DEMBELE
Age 27, Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) & Belgium

Central midfielder who has been a cornerstone of his national side even when not playing at his best for Spurs.



Clint DEMPSEY
Age 32, Seattle Sounders & USA

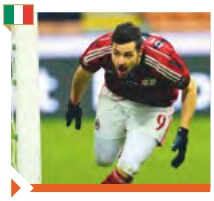
Goalscorer, national team captain and one of the highest earners in MLS. Did well at Fulham and Tottenham but failed to settle in London.

Memphis DEPAY
Age 21, PSV & Holland

Holland's youngest World Cup goalscorer with his strike against Australia last summer. Fine form for PSV has Liverpool and others on his case.

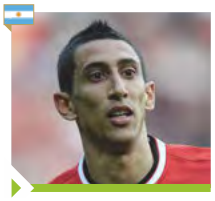
Laurent DEPOITRE
Age 26, Gent & Belgium

Tall, powerful striker who is a regular scorer in Belgium. Joined Gent last summer but looking for a bigger league.



Mattia DESTRO
Age 23, Milan & Italy

Italian international striker who joined Milan on loan from Roma in the January transfer window in a bid for more playing time.



Angel DI MARIA
Age 27, Manchester United (Eng) & Argentina

At £59.7m, a record signing for both United and English football. Yet to sparkle under Louis Van Gaal but a world-class talent.

David DE GEA

Age 24, Manchester United (Eng) & Spain

There is plenty of competition for the unofficial title of the world's best goalkeeper. Germany's World Cup-winning number one Manuel Neuer leads the ranks of elite "sweeper-keepers"; Chelsea's Thibaut Courtois has excelled in his first season in the English Premier League after three impressive years on loan at Atletico Madrid; and Juventus stopper Gianluigi Buffon remains as imperious as ever.

But De Gea's form at Manchester United places him at least on a par with those three. "David De Gea, this year, is unbelievable," declared manager Louis Van Gaal after a narrow victory

over Newcastle United. "In my career I have a lot of good goalkeepers, for example Edwin Van der Sar was one of my goalkeepers and [Victor] Valdes also with Barcelona, but De Gea is having a great season."

Amid the personnel changes and tactical tinkering during the Dutchman's difficult first year at United, the one constant has been De Gea. The Spaniard has played every minute of every league and cup match.

Defensively, United have been vulnerable, not least because of the summer departure of Nemanja Vidic, Rio Ferdinand and Patrice Evra. By the start of March, they had made 25 errors leading to shots on their goal in the Premier League. Only Everton had made more mistakes. But United's position would have been a lot worse had it not been for the form of their keeper, who has the highest save percentage, at 75 per cent, of any Premier League number one.

De Gea joined United from Atletico Madrid in 2011, signing a five-year contract that now has less than 18 months to run. In theory, he could leave on a free in summer 2016. Talks about a new deal are ongoing, with Van Gaal acknowledging his keeper could move on. "In football, everything is possible," he says. "We want to keep him."

Jorge Mendes, De Gea's agent, also refuses to rule out a possible summer departure from Old Trafford. "He's a United player and has a contract there," says Mendes. "You have to respect that, but things change every five minutes."

Real Madrid, seeking a long-term replacement for former international Iker Casillas, have an interest in taking him back to Spain, although River Plate youngster Augusto Batalla is high on the wanted list of the European Champions.

United signed former Barca keeper Valdes in January to provide competition for De Gea.

The Mendes stable of blue-chip clients also includes United misfit Radamel Falcao, as well as the likes of Angel Di Maria and Cristiano Ronaldo, so expect De Gea's name to be linked with all sorts of potential deals over the coming months.

But such is De Gea's worth to United that a deal to keep the keeper at Old Trafford would be the most valuable of all.

John Holmesdale

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK #WS500

Bas DOST

Age 25, Wolfsburg (Ger) & Holland

Wolfsburg's third-choice striker for the first half of this season – he was back-up to Croatia's Ivica Olic and Niklas Bendtner of Denmark – the giant Dutch front-man was rumoured to be very close to signing for a Premier League side during the German winter break. But for reasons best known to himself, he opted to fight on in Lower Saxony – and how splendidly that decision has turned out.

Since netting twice in the 4-1 thumping of Bayern Munich on the first weekend of the "Spring Championship", the thoroughly rejuvenated Dost has been tucking away chances with metronomic glee and even managed the remarkable feat of four goals in one game in an incredible 5-4 victory at Bayer Leverkusen in February.

Linking brilliantly in the attacking third with Kevin De Bruyne, he went from fifth wheel at the VW-owned club to top-of-the-range model in a matter of weeks due, to a large degree, to restored confidence and belief.

With Olic allowed to move on to Hamburg in the transfer window and Bendtner proving to be as unreliable as he was at Arsenal, the decision of Wolfsburg coach Dieter Hecking to make Dost his line leader for 2015 was just the sort of morale boost the ex-Heerenveen target man needed. And with the goals immediately flowing, the snowball has become an irresistible avalanche.

What makes this particular success story all the more amazing is that many in the German media had long given up on the Dutchman.

Brought in three years ago after rattling in no fewer than 32 Eredivisie goals during the 2011-12 campaign, Dost was expected to be an instant success in the Bundesliga. But undermined by inconsistency and several injury problems, he only rarely flared into sharpshooting life.

"I did have a rough time," admitted Dost in a recent interview with *Kicker* magazine. "However, you also have to bear in mind that the standard of play in Germany is higher.

"Crucially, I've developed a lot as a person. I've had to learn not to get frustrated by things. Now I simply concentrate on giving my all without brooding on this or that.

"It's the German mentality and previously I didn't have it."

Tipped to soon break into the full *Oranje* squad, Dost ironically owes a huge debt of gratitude to the medical chief at Wolfsburg's Bundesliga rivals, Bayern Munich. Following months of trouble with a hamstring, he travelled to Munich in 2013 to consult orthopaedic guru Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt and within minutes, the problem area had been located and the treatment prescribed.

"He closed his eyes, probed with his fingers, then pushed on the spot which no one else had managed to find before," recalls Dost. "It's fantastic to get up in the morning pain-free.

"I'd been worried it would never get better. Dr Muller-Wohlfahrt helped me so much."

Who said football was incurably tribal?

Nick Bidwell

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK #WS500

Antonio DI NATALE
Age 37, Udinese & Italy

Veteran striker and twice Serie A's leading scorer, he is set to retire this summer after a prolific career at unfashionable Udinese.

Marcelo DIAZ
Age 28, Hamburg (Ger) & Chile

Midfielder and a crucial cog in the national side, holding things together to allow others to flourish. Moved to the Bundesliga from Basle in January.

Brice DJA DJEDJE
Age 24, Marseille (Fra) & Ivory Coast

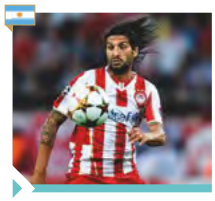
A former Paris Saint-Germain trainee, the Ivorian has been the standout performer in Marseille's defence this season.

Server DJEPAROV
Age 32, Ulsan (SKo) & Uzbekistan

Korea-based attacker who has twice won the Asian footballer of the year award. A key figure for the Uzbek national side.

Borek DOCKAL
Age 26, Sparta Prague & Czech Rep

Attacking midfielder who has been the best performer in the Czech league after spells in Turkey and Norway did not work out.



Alejandro DOMINGUEZ
Age 33, Olympiakos (Ger) & Argentina

Much-travelled forward enjoying a final career flourish in Greece. A former World Youth Cup winner.

Alexander DOMINGUEZ
Age 27, LDU Quito & Ecuador

Gangling, spidery figure who is Ecuador's first choice goalkeeper. A Libertadores Cup winner with his club in 2008.

Giovani DOS SANTOS
Age 25, Villarreal (Spa) & Mexico

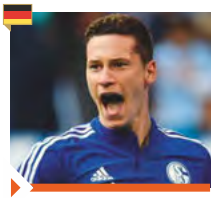
One of Mexico's leading attackers, returning to top form with Villarreal after a spell of injuries.

Jonathan DOS SANTOS
Age 24, Villarreal (Spa) & Mexico

Long in the shadow of Giovani but has thrived at Villarreal since linking up with his brother last summer.

DOUGLAS Costa
Age 24, Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) & Brazil

Attacking midfielder, he came to prominence with Brazil's under-20 side. Shakhtar's main man and linked with a move to England.

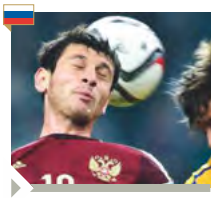


Julian DRAXLER
Age 21, Schalke & Germany

Young attacker and 2014 World Cup winner whose recent progress has been slowed by injuries. Linked with a move to the Premier League.

Paulo DYBALA
Age 21, Palermo (Ita) & Argentina

Striker who has been a scoring revelation this season, prompting speculation that Palermo will cash in on him this summer.

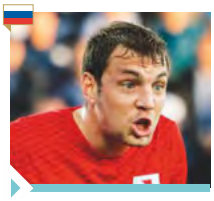


Alan DZAGOEV
Age 24, CSKA Moscow & Russia

Attacking midfielder who made his senior Russia debut aged 18 and impressed at Euro 2012. A central figure for the 2018 World Cup hosts.

Edin DZEKO
Age 28, Manchester City (Eng) & Bosnia

A key figure in Bosnia reaching a first World Cup finals. In and out of the City team but could command a big fee in the summer.



Artyom DZYUBA
Age 26, Spartak Moscow & Russia

Tall target man and a regular scorer in the league. Called up last autumn after being left out of the World Cup squad.

Mohamed EL NENNY
Age 22, Basle (Swi) & Egypt

Central midfielder who impressed in Basle's run to the Champions League knockout stage. Already a key figure for Egypt's national side.

Breel EMBOLO

Age 18, Basle & Switzerland

Fans of the Swiss national team received their Christmas present a couple of weeks early last year when the Basle wunderkind forward revealed his decision to represent his adopted homeland rather than the country of his birth.

Born in the Cameroon capital of Yaounde but raised, from the age of six, in Basle – where he, his mother and elder brother settled in search of a better life – the teenager was clearly torn while weighing up the pros and cons. Lobbied in person by Samuel Eto'o, he might easily have gone down the star-struck route, but eventually opted to give the thumbs-up to Switzerland.

"I gave it a lot of thought and in the end I plumped for the country where I spent most of my childhood and adolescence, and where my football career has developed," says Embolo, who had already represented the Swiss in a range of youth categories. "I've close links to both countries. It wasn't a case of being for one and against the other. Unfortunately you can't play for two nations."

One moment a kid with Basle's juniors, the next a Swiss league and European prodigy, Embolo has certainly been in a hurry in his scramble to the top. Last spring he scored his first goal just four minutes into his senior Basle debut and this season he has been turning heads in the Champions League at the age of just 17, proving so full of promise in a tie against Real Madrid that both Cristiano Ronaldo and Toni Kroos both had kind words for him.

Basle team-mate, midfielder Fabian Frei, cannot imagine the teenager becoming side-tracked by fame, explaining: "He's not one to try and score the goal of the season and you can offer him advice without him taking offence." But he has not always been as exemplary in his attitude. Youth-team coach Kurt Muller remembers young Embolo often behaving badly in training, and after daring to drop his shorts at one session he was banned for three weeks.

Muller admits he was on the verge of making the suspension permanent. But, such was the youngster's talent, he was given another chance

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK #WS500

– and how he has made the most of it.

"I like everything about him," says current Basle coach Paulo Sousa, and there certainly is a lot to enthuse over. Muscular, quick, powerful in his shooting and good with his back to goal, he threatens in any number of ways.

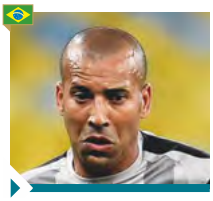
Although normally a striker, he performed very well on the right in a decisive Champions League match at Liverpool in December, and as a youth-team player he often lined up in midfield, equally happy as a number 10 or a ball winner.

Scooping two prizes – Best Youngster and Fan Favourite – at the Swiss League's 2014 awards ceremony and reported to be a priority for a host of continental conglomerates, he is the two-state sensation of St Jakob-Park.

Nick Bidwell

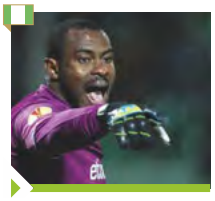
ELIAS
Age 29, Corinthians & Brazil

All-round midfielder who is proficient at bursting beyond the strikers. Now back where he made his name after failing to sparkle in Europe.



EMERSON
Age 36, Corinthians & Brazil

Capped by Brazil at under-20 level and later played three times for Qatar, even though ineligible. Has been caught biting opponents in the past.



Vincent ENYEAMA
Age 32, Lille (Fra) & Nigeria

National captain and Africa's leading goalkeeper who has been exceptional behind a tight Lille defence over the past two seasons.

Roman EREMENKO
Age 27, CSKA Moscow (Rus) & Finland

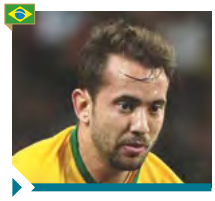
Russian-born, but a Finland mainstay for many years. Brother Alexei Jnr is also a Finnish international.

Christian ERIKSEN
Age 23, Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) & Denmark

Former Ajax star who is the leading Danish player of his generation and Spurs' most creative influence. A free-kick specialist.

Pablo ESCOBAR
Age 36, The Strongest & Bolivia

Paraguayan-born, the left-footed playmaker is the outstanding performer in domestic Bolivian football. In his second spell with his club.

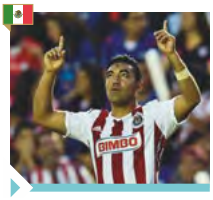


EVERTON RIBEIRO
Age 25, Al Ahli (UAE) & Brazil

The star of Cruzeiro's Brazilian title-winning team last term, the attacking midfielder opted to move to the Gulf for a reported €15m this year.

Jonathan FABBRO
Age 33, Cerro Porteno & Paraguay

Veteran playmaker, born in Argentina but settled in Paraguay, where he plays for the most popular club and national team.



Marco FABIAN
Age 25, Guadalajara & Mexico

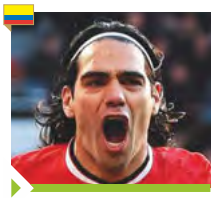
Hugely promising player for a long time, he is the leading light in trying to save Chivas, Mexico's most popular team, in their fight against relegation.

FABIO
Age 34, Cruzeiro & Brazil

In the Brazil squad as far back as the 2003 Confederations Cup but never capped – an injustice to a top-class goalkeeper and captain of his club.

Cesc FABREGAS
Age 27, Chelsea (Eng) & Spain

Plays as a false-nine forward for his country, but the ex-Arsenal and Barcelona star fulfils a hugely important central midfield role for Chelsea.



Radamel FALCAO
Age 29, Manchester United (Eng) & Colombia

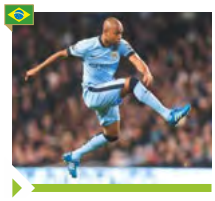
Prolific scorer at Porto, Atletico Madrid and Monaco but faltering in England after a knee injury kept him out of the World Cup.

Sofiane FEGHOULI
Age 25, Valencia (Spa) & Algeria

Quick midfielder who plays out wide, he is a former French under-21 international who switched allegiance to Algeria. Linked with a move from Valencia.

Nabil FEKIR
Age 21, Lyon & France

Born in France to Algerian parents, the forward from the Lyon academy has opted to play for *Les Bleus*.



FERNANDINHO
Age 29, Manchester City (Eng) & Brazil

Defensive midfielder who suffered World Cup humiliation but is still in the squad.

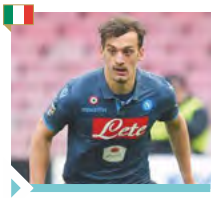
PROFILED
FELIPE ANDERSON
ON PAGE 54

Roberto FIRMINO
Age 23, Hoffenheim (Ger) & Brazil

Goalscoring midfielder who has played his way into the Brazil national side this season. Moved to Germany as a teenager.

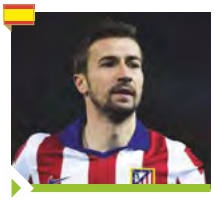
FRED
Age 31, Fluminense & Brazil

Centre-forward seen by some as one of the chief villains of Brazil's World Cup campaign, he hit back to be top scorer in last year's national championship.



Manolo GABBIADINI
Age 23, Napoli & Italy

Free-kick specialist signed from Sampdoria in January. Prolific scorer for Italy's under-21s. Sister Melania is a women's international.



GABI
Age 31, Atletico Madrid & Spain

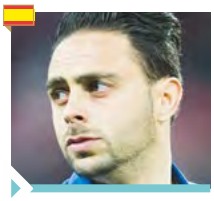
The unsung hero of Atletico's recent success, he's the club captain and midfield linchpin. Madrid-born, in his second spell at the club.

Nico GAITAN
Age 27, Benfica (Por) & Argentina

Highly accomplished midfielder, Benfica's chief creative force and coveted by wealthier clubs. Recently recalled by Argentina.

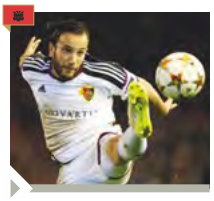
Paulo Henrique GANSO
Age 25, Sao Paulo & Brazil

Playmaker once seen as the great hope of Brazilian football. Still has moments of pure class, but lacking in dynamism.



Sergio GARCIA
Age 31, Espanyol & Spain

Forward or wide attacker whose goals have carried Espanyol this season. Former Barcelona trainee who has represented Spain at all levels.



Shkelzen GASHI
Age 26, Basle (Swi) & Albania

Swiss-born and capped at youth level until switching to Albania. Top scorer in the Swiss league last season.

PROFILED **Ryan GAULD** ON PAGE 58

Jose GAYA
Age 19, Valencia & Spain

Academy product and under-21 left-back who Valencia are keen to tie to a new contract following interest from Real Madrid and Manchester City.

Johannes GEIS
Age 21, Mainz & Germany

Versatile attacking midfielder who has represented Germany at every level from under-16 through to under-21. On many club's wanted lists.

Steven GERRARD
Age 35, Liverpool & England

Highly influential captain of Liverpool for the past decade but will move to LA Galaxy in the summer.

PROFILED **GERVINHO** ON PAGE 56

Andre-Pierre GIGNAC
Age 29, Marseille & France

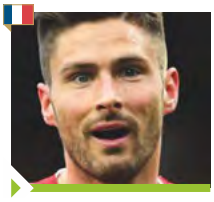
Striker whose fine goalscoring form this term has earned a recall to the national side.

Jose GIMENEZ
Age 20, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & Uruguay

Young centre-back who impressed at the 2014 World Cup and has since been courted by some of Europe's top clubs.

Sebastian GIOVINCO
Age 28, Toronto (USA) & Italy

Diminutive Italian international attacker, dubbed "*formica atomica*" (atomic ant), signed from Juventus in a major coup for MLS.



Olivier GIROUD
Age 28, Arsenal (Eng) & France

Centre-forward who has faced criticism at times during his three seasons at Arsenal but remains a key spearhead of the club's attack.

Diego GODIN
Age 29, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & Uruguay

Powerful centre-back who was arguably the world's best defender of 2014 for both club – as they won La Liga – and country.

Yannick FERREIRA CARRASCO

Age 21, Monaco (Fra) & Belgium

Over the last 40 years, Monaco have had many outstanding wingers: particularly Christian Dalger, Albert Emon, Bruno Bellone, Youssouf Fofana and, last but by no means least, Thierry Henry. Belgium under-21 international Yannick Ferreira Carrasco undoubtedly belongs in the same good company.

In his third season in the Monegasque pro ranks, the Brussels-born son of a Spanish mother and Portuguese father has been one of the most exhilarating attackers in Ligue 1, and further boosted his profile when coming off the bench to notch the final goal in the 3-1 victory at Arsenal in the Champions League.

Although a little too individualistic at times, he has the speed, inventiveness, audacity and shooting power to trouble the best defences. He can run all day, and while happiest cutting in from the left is effective on the right, too.

"He boasts the ingredient which is so important in today's game: attacking incisiveness and directness," says Belgium under-21 assistant coach Jean-Francois Remy. "Not many players have it. Like Franck Ribery, he possesses the ability to beat a defender with a change in rhythm. He can be devastating with these variations in tempo. When he dribbles, he does so to gain ground and this is where he makes the difference."

Ferreira Carrasco, picked up from Belgian side Genk in 2010 at the age of 16, certainly seems to have fully recovered after falling out of favour in the second half of last season. A regular starter early on, he found himself the fifth wheel following coach Claudio Ranieri's decision to make a mid-term switch to a midfield diamond. Just to complicate matters, he also picked up a troublesome ankle injury.

During the first five months of 2014, he began only a handful of games and it was even suggested by *L'Equipe* that he was sidelined by boardroom diktat, banished to the fringes for being far too greedy in contract renegotiations.

At one point, a €6million move to Roma was in the offing. However, with new boss Leonardo Jardim keen to make extensive use of him, the youngster finally decided to stay put. Since putting pen to paper on that new and improved deal – which runs until 2019 – he has gone from strength to strength, his excellent break-out work proving manna from heaven for Jardim's counter-attacking beliefs.

What a shame for the uncapped youngster that the Belgian national side already has an abundance of talent in wide areas with Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne, Kevin Mirallas, Nacer Chadli and Dries Mertens. But if anyone can get past the competition it's "YFC".

Nick Bidwell

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Mario GOMEZ
Age 29, Fiorentina (Ita) & Germany

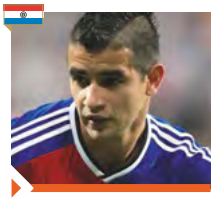
Centre-forward omitted from Germany's 2014 World Cup squad but his goals in 2015 suggest "Super Mario" is back on song.

Maxime GONALONS
Age 26, Lyon & France

Midfield enforcer and current captain of French title contenders Lyon but could be tempted by a move to England.

Alfonso GONZALEZ
Age 20, Atlas & Mexico

Midfielder tipped as Mexico's next number 10. Capped by the national team having played for the under-17 world champions.



Derlis GONZALEZ
Age 21, Basle (Swi) & Paraguay

Quick, versatile forward who has stepped up to the senior national squad after switching to Basle from Benfica and gaining Champions League experience.

Mark GONZALEZ
Age 30, Uni Catolica & Chile

South African-born winger now rebuilding his career back in Chile after injury-hit seasons in Europe. Recently recalled to the Chile national side.

Omar GONZALEZ
Age 26, LA Galaxy & USA

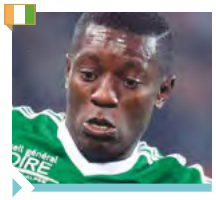
Leading American centre-back, born and raised in Texas to Mexican parents. Holds dual citizenship but now well established in the US national side.

Mario GOTZE
Age 22, Bayern Munich & Germany

Scorer of the only goal in the 2014 World Cup Final and one of Germany's brightest talents. Son of a university professor.

Ricardo GOULART
Age 23, Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) & Brazil

Starred in Cruzeiro's 2014 Brazilian league success and has become the Chinese league's record signing in a £12m move.

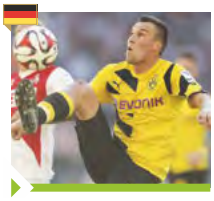


Max GRADEL
Age 27, Saint-Etienne (Fra) & Ivory Coast

In sparkling form for *Les Verts* this season and impressive as Ivory Coast's main creative attacking force at the African Nations Cup.

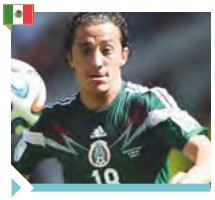
Antoine GRIEZMANN
Age 24, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & France

Forward who has not been overawed by the £23m fee that Atletico paid Real Sociedad for him last summer.



Kevin GROSSKREUTZ
Age 26, Borussia Dortmund & Germany

Full-back who can play on either flank. Has tattoos on his back of trophies he has won, including the World Cup.

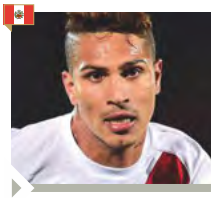


Andres GUARDADO
Age 28, PSV (Hol) & Mexico

Left-sided midfielder who has been one of the top performers in the Eredivisie this season as PSV head for the title.

Nemanja GUDELJ
Age 23, AZ (Hol) & Serbia

Central midfielder with a powerful shot. Club captain at AZ and a Serbian international who has been linked with a move to a bigger league.



Paolo GUERRERO
Age 31, Corinthians (Bra) & Peru

One of his club's great foreign idols, the Peruvian international centre-forward was the hero of his side's Club World Cup triumph in 2012.

Ilkay GUNDOGAN
Age 24, Borussia Dortmund & Germany

Creative midfielder who missed the 2014 World Cup through injury. His return to fitness has coincided with his club's move up the Bundesliga.

Teofilo GUTIERREZ
Age 29, River Plate (Arg) & Colombia

Unpredictable and much-travelled striker whose career has been marred by problems off the pitch.

FELIPE ANDERSON

Age 21, Lazio (Ita) & Brazil

He may have taken his time, but make no mistake, Lazio's Brazilian has finally arrived. Far from an overnight sensation after arriving in Rome in the summer of 2013, a superb spell either side of the Christmas-New Year period this season has finally seen the midfielder fulfil his promise.

The former Santos player came to Lazio with a €9million price tag and a very particular job reference. Not only did commentators refer to an

excellent 2012 campaign in his homeland, they also reported the enthusiastic endorsement of his former Santos team-mate, Neymar.

Some people, however, churlishly suggested his final few months in Brazil were not exceptional. And his acclimatisation to Italian football wasn't helped by an unsettled Lazio that had sacked Bosnian coach Vladimir Petkovic in mid-season, replacing him with the experienced Edy Reja.

But it has all been so different this term. When Lazio's right-sided attacking midfielder Antonio Candreva was injured in early December, coach Stefano Pioli had little choice but to reinvent the Brazilian as a right-winger. Given that he can play off either foot this caused him no problems, and by the time Candreva was fit again Anderson had secured a regular starting spot. Two goals against Internazionale in late December's 2-2 draw served notice, and then he set up two and scored one in a 3-0 win against Sampdoria.

It was to get even better in January's Rome derby when he set up the first goal for captain Stefano Mauri before scoring the second himself with a firecracker from outside the area. Even if Lazio's joy was mitigated by the Francesco Totti-led recovery which saw Roma fight back for a 2-2 draw, it was clear for all to see that Italian football had a new star.

A player who combines fierce pace, unstoppable dribbling and a penchant for the spectacular long-range goal, it would seem likely that, come the end of this season, he will be on his way to the Premier League or La Liga. In the meantime, Lazio fans would do well to enjoy the ride.

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#WS500

The same might apply to Anderson himself. Fortune's fickle wheel dealt him a mixed hand in January. At the very moment of his breakthrough, he was shaken by news that his father had been arrested for murder and charged with having killed his wife's former lover and an innocent bystander as a result of a furious car chase.

Paddy Agnew

GERVINHO

Age 27, Roma (Ita) & Ivory Coast

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"I really like Gervinho, his pace splits a defence. Sure, sometimes he makes the most amazing mistakes but he deserved that winning goal against Feyenoord for his overall performance."

Those are the words of former Roma captain Giacomo Losi, on the February night that Roma beat Feyenoord 2-1 in Rotterdam to qualify for the last 16 of the Europa League. Arsenal fans would probably recognise the above sentiments, given that in his two seasons in London he had a tendency to miss sitters.

But while the Ivory Coast international can still miss them, things have changed.

Since moving to Roma in the summer of 2013, he has become arguably the most important weapon in Roma's attacking armory. His pace, ability to run past defences and, above all, his delivery of a killer final pass have made him a key performer for Rudi Garcia's side. On top of that, as the two Feyenoord games showed, he even scores the odd goal – although his record in Serie A isn't great this term.

Garcia and Roma's veteran skipper Francesco Totti are among the factors which have seen a renaissance in Gervinho's game. Garcia, who coached him for two successful seasons at Lille in France, has huge belief in him. As for the 38-year-old Totti, it would be hard to imagine a player better suited to making the most of the Italian's accurate passing game.

Like the entire Roma squad, Gervinho has suffered this season from the devastating psychological impact of a 7-1 home drubbing by Bayern Munich in the Champions League last October. However, the key nature of his Roma role was never more obvious than in the first six weeks of 2015 when – while he was in Africa winning the Nations Cup – Roma had a disastrous run in which they drew seven out of nine Serie A games.

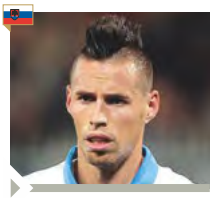
As is his way, Gervinho did not go unnoticed at the Nations Cup in Equatorial Guinea, either. He started off with a sending-off in Ivory Coast's opening 1-1 draw with the host country and ended up with an important goal in the 3-1 semi-final win over DR Congo. He also provided one of the great photo-op moments of the tournament as he sat on the touchline with his back to the Final penalty shoot-out as goalkeeper Boubacar Barry gave Ivory Coast a dramatic 9-8 title win. Substituted just before the end of extra time, he was probably glad he did not have to take a spot-kick given he missed one in the shoot-out of the 2012 Final against Zambia.

Having proved himself an important, if frustrating, ingredient of a winning side at international level, can he do the same for Roma?

Paddy Agnew

Asamoah GYAN
Age 29, Al Ain (UAE) & Ghana

Plays his club football in the Gulf but remains very important as his country's all-time top scorer. Injury limited his effectiveness at the 2015 Nations Cup.



Marek HAMSIK
Age 27, Napoli (Ita) & Slovakia

The midfielder has been the subject of interest from Premier League clubs but has chosen to stay as the captain of Napoli. Also captain of his country.

Samir HANDANOVIC
Age 30, Internazionale (Ita) & Slovenia

Goalkeeper with a fine record of penalty saves. Tied to Inter until 2016 but they could cash in this summer.

Joe HART
Age 27, Manchester City & England

The world's highest-paid keeper, he has responded well to being dropped by City last season and remains England's No 1.

Gabriel HAUCHE
Age 28, Tijuana (Mex) & Argentina

Forward who has been the best foreign player in the Mexican League so far this season, having impressed in Argentina with Racing.

Eden HAZARD
Age 24, Chelsea (Eng) & Belgium

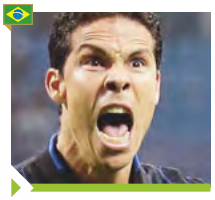
In sparkling form for Chelsea this season, a strong candidate to be voted footballer of the year and the likely recipient of a new bumper pay deal.

Thorgan HAZARD
Age 21, Bor M'gladbach (Ger) & Belgium

The younger brother of Eden and a similar type of player. His progress stalled at Chelsea so he moved permanently to Germany in February.

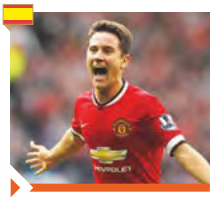
Jordan HENDERSON
Age 24, Liverpool & England

The likely successor to Gerrard as Liverpool's captain. Has grown in stature in past 18 months and now an England regular.



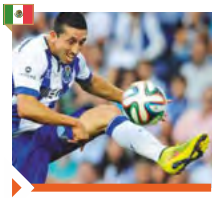
HERNANES
Age 29, Internazionale (Ita) & Brazil

Versatile central midfielder who has not played for Brazil since the 2014 World Cup. Switched from Lazio to Inter last summer.



Ander HERRERA
Age 25, Manchester United (Eng) & Spain

Midfield playmaker who has been one of the more successful signings from United's 2014 summer spending spree.



Hector HERRERA
Age 24, Porto (Por) & Mexico

Versatile midfielder who is one of the brightest talents Mexico has produced in recent years. Was an Olympic gold medallist in 2012.

Johnny HERRERA
Age 33, Univ de Chile & Chile

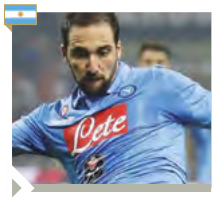
Controversial, high-profile figure who is his country's reserve goalkeeper and has been a pillar in the successful last few years of his club side.

Patrick HERRMANN
Age 24 Bor M'gladbach & Germany

Former under-21 winger who has attracted interest from a number of English Premier League clubs.

Federico HIGUAIN
Age 30, Columbus Crew (USA) & Argentina

Attacking midfielder who is Columbus Crew's Designated Player in MLS. The elder brother of Gonzalo.



Gonzalo HIGUAIN
Age 27, Napoli (Ita) & Argentina

Centre-forward and highly effective, hard-working target man. A regular goalscorer for Napoli after seven seasons at Real Madrid.

Oleksandr HLADKYY
Age 27, Shakhtar Donetsk & Ukraine

Centre-forward who has been in excellent form since he returned to Shakhtar last summer.

Ryan GAULD

Age 19, Sporting Lisbon (Por) & Scotland

Sporting Lisbon have long been the standard-bearers for producing Portugal's finest home-grown talent, so one of the most intriguing moves last summer was the acquisition of Dundee United's teenage playmaker Ryan Gauld. For an 18-year-old foreigner to earn a place at the famed Alcochete Academy, he had to be special. After all, the club knows a bit about bringing through young prospects and it is not as though the well had run dry.

The same school that nurtured Luis Figo, Joao Moutinho and Cristiano Ronaldo has another exceptionally gifted crop of youngsters making headway in the first team, with midfielder Joao Mario in particular already showing enough to suggest he could be headed for the very top.

Just how much Sporting thought of Gauld – the first Scot to wear the team's famous green and white shirt – was shown by a six-year contract, with a €60million release clause written in, not to mention the reported €3m transfer fee paid to the Scottish club.

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It was an audacious move – and an even braver one by Gauld. Scottish players bursting with potential traditionally make the short trip south of the border, especially with the money sloshing around the English top flight. Gauld was not short of offers, a string of outstanding displays in Scotland alerting Manchester United among others. But he was set on breaking new ground and has no regrets. "Sporting was my first choice," he told the club's official newspaper. "Here a player has everything he could want."

A natural number 10, Gauld's creativity manifests itself in crisp, swift and inventive passing, attributes that have come to the fore in Sporting's B team as he has been carefully bedded into his new surroundings. His sharp finishing was also on display in only his second senior start as he scored twice against local rivals Belenenses. He also brings a surprising physicality despite his slight frame; a facet of his play that is visibly improving game by game.

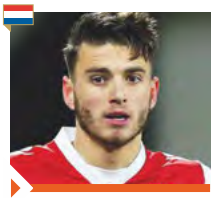
"I feel more competitive and physically stronger than when I arrived and I hope to continue to grow," says Gauld. "I have improved a lot and I've managed to adapt to the football here."

Manuel Fernandes, a prolific striker in the 1970s and 1980s, is the second-highest goalscorer in Sporting's history and later coached the club. He believes Gauld's explosion onto the Portuguese scene is more a question of when rather than if.

"Gauld is an extremely technical player, with an extraordinary quality in his passing," says Fernandes. "I think the only reason the Sporting coach hasn't given him more minutes in the first team is because he has to bulk up, given his position where he's always in the thick of it. But his game is suited to the style of football here. In one or two years he'll be a major player for us."

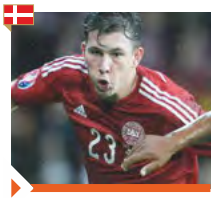
The integration of an outsider into a club's famed academy echoes the enrolment of a certain Lionel Messi into that other great Iberian finishing school, Barcelona's La Masia. Gauld was dubbed "mini Messi" at Dundee United, and Sporting fans will be hoping his decision to pursue his football education abroad proves as fruitful as that of the Argentinian.

Tom Kundert



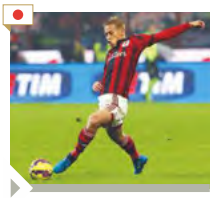
Wesley HOEDT
Age 21, AZ & Holland

Under-21 centre-back who will join Lazio on a free transfer this summer after his employers in Alkmaar refused to sell him in the January window.



Pierre HOJBJERG
Age 19, Augsburg (Ger) & Denmark

The midfielder was Bayern's youngest Bundesliga debutant, in 2013, but his progress stalled and he was loaned out in January.



Keisuke HONDA
Age 28, Milan (Ita) & Japan

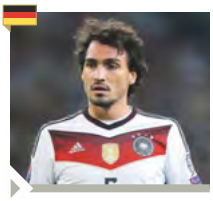
Attacking midfielder, free-kick specialist and Japanese football's top star. Struggled after a move to Italy last year but has sparkled under Filippo Inzaghi this term.

Benedikt HOWEDES
Age 27, Schalke & Germany

Schalke captain and international defender who can play in a number of positions. A potential summer target for English clubs.

HULK
Age 28, Zenit (Rus) & Brazil

Powerful forward but a fall guy for Brazil's World Cup humiliation. His big salary is resented by some Zenit team-mates but he has recently signed a new deal.



Mats HUMMELS
Age 26, Borussia Dormund & Germany

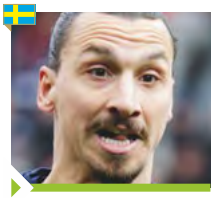
Central defender and important figure in his country's World Cup triumph. A reported summer target for Manchester United.

Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR
Age 31, Schalke (Ger) & Holland

Prolific centre-forward, ex-Ajax, Milan and Real Madrid, who has an impressive scoring record for Holland, despite not always being first choice.

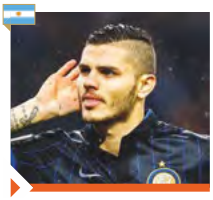
Khalfan IBRAHIM
Age 27, Al Sadd & Qatar

Former Asian footballer of the year, central figure of the Qatari national side and leading domestic figure in the Qatar Super League.



Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC
Age 33, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Sweden

Critics claim he fades in big games but 11 league titles in 13 years with six different clubs in four leagues is matchless.

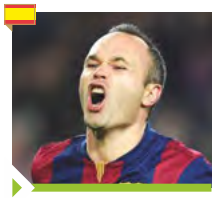


Mauro ICARDI
Age 22, Internazionale (Ita) & Argentina

Exciting forward with a troubled personal life. On the fringes of the Argentina squad after leading Serie A scoring charts this season.

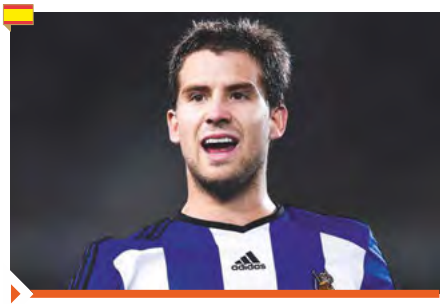
Gianelli IMBULA
Age 22, Marseille & France

Under-21 midfielder who is being tracked by a number of Premier League clubs. Marseille's best player this season as they challenge for the title.



Andres INIESTA
Age 30, Barcelona & Spain

The World Cup-winning midfielder has struggled this season, failing to score or provide his trademark assists. Under contract to Barca until 2018.

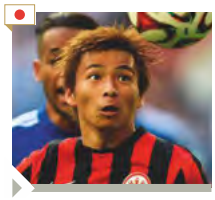


INIGO MARTINEZ
Age 23, Real Sociedad & Spain

Central defender who has come through the ranks at Sociedad and is being tipped for a summer move to a Champions League club.

Lorenzo INSIGNE
Age 23, Napoli & Italy

Energetic 5ft 4in forward who takes a decent free-kick. Born and raised in Naples. On the way back after damaging knee ligaments last November.



Takashi INUI
Age 26, Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger) & Japan

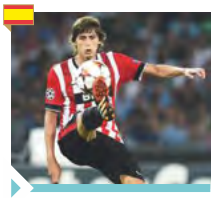
Attacking midfielder or playmaker who has taken on an increasingly important role for the national side in the past year.

ISCO
Age 22, Real Madrid & Spain

Midfield playmaker, he was Carlo Ancelotti's first signing for Madrid and has been a key performer this season in the absence of the injured Luka Modric.

Dhurgham ISMAIL
Age 20, Al Shorta & Iraq

Left-back or winger who was one of the most impressive performers at the recent 2015 Asian Cup in Australia and is on Liverpool's radar.



Ander ITURRASPE
Age 26, Athletic Bilbao & Spain

Defensive linchpin and the mainstay of Athletic's midfield in recent seasons. In Spain's provisional 2014 World Cup squad but missed the final cut.

Branislav IVANOVIC
Age 31, Chelsea (Eng) & Serbia

Tough defender who scores some important goals for his club from right-back. He can also play in central defence when needed.

JADSON
Age 31, Corinthians & Brazil

Little midfielder with a fine range of passing but consistently undervalued in Brazilian football. Recently rejected a big money offer from China.

Christophe JALLET
Age 31, Lyon & France

Veteran right-back who is enjoying a new lease of life since moving to Lyon from PSG last summer. He has won seven France caps.

Adnan JANUZAJ
Age 20, Manchester United (Eng) & Belgium

Has not featured frequently under Louis Van Gaal but remains United's – and Belgium's – most exciting prospect.

JAVI MARTINEZ
Age 26, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Spain

Defensive midfielder or centre-back whose versatility is invaluable for club and country. Near to a return from a ligament injury.

Mile JEDINAK
Age 30, Crystal Palace (Eng) & Australia

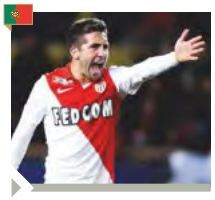
Sydney-born, fiercely competitive defensive central midfielder. Captain of both his club and Asian champions Australia.

JEFFERSON
Age 32, Botafogo & Brazil

Leading the race to succeed Julio Cesar as Brazil's first-choice keeper, although his club have been relegated to the second division.

JOAO MARIO
Age 22, Sporting Lisbon & Portugal

Midfielder and graduate of the club's academy, tipped to revive Portugal's number 10 tradition in the style of Deco.



JOAO MOUTINHO
Age 28, Monaco (Fra) & Portugal

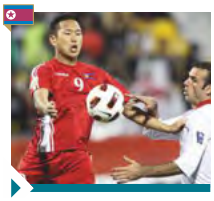
Former Sporting Lisbon and Porto playmaker who is the "on-field boss" for Monaco. Also a crucial figure for his national side.

JOAOZINHO
Age 26, Krasnodar (Rus) & Brazil

Midfielder who has been outstanding in his four years at Krasnodar. Was a champion in Bulgaria with Levski Sofia.

Jermaine JONES
Age 33, New England Revolution & USA

Feisty midfielder, who was born in Germany, where his father was a US soldier. Played in the Bundesliga before moving last year.



JONG Tae-se
Age 31, Suwon (Sko) & North Korea

Striker born and raised in Japan who is now North Korea's leading footballer. Has also played in Germany for Bochum and Cologne.

Luka JOVIC
Age 17, Red Star Belgrade & Serbia

Forward tipped as Serbian football's next wonderkid. Already a Red Star regular and being watched by a number of top clubs.

JONATHAS

Age 26, Elche (Spa) & Brazil

Nine goals and six assists so far this season is not a bad return for a player at a club that is fighting against relegation from La Liga. And particularly one where the players are not being paid and the directors have been forced to back down, punished for mismanagement.

Between goals and assists, Jonathas has provided more than 50 per cent of Elche's goals this season. Until recently, he had been directly involved in every single goal the team had scored from open play. No player in La Liga has directly earned as many points for their team with goals and assists. And as the player himself admits: "It is harder to score goals here. At Madrid you get five or six chances a game. Here, it's two."

Watching Elche play, their sense of dependence on the Brazilian striker is enhanced beyond the purely statistical: everything the side do involves him. He chases everything and fights everyone, turning the least promising "pass" into the beginning of an attacking move. At 6ft 3in, quick, strong, skilful, and prepared to take on whoever stands before him, his coach likens Jonathas to Diego Costa. As well as the goals and assists, he has eight yellow cards and one red so far this season – no team-mate has more.

"He is hard to mark, he protects the ball well and he has the skill to play as a number 10 too," Elche's boss Fran Escriba told *El Pais*. "He also has that ambition that means he plays to the limit, pushing the edges."

Escriba remembers the first time he saw Jonathas play. He had been told about him by Victor Orta, now Elche's sporting director but then Zenit's chief of scouting. "I was surprised that he didn't have teams chasing him because he was already standing out at Latina, in the Italian second division," he recalls.

Jonathas has had a curious career. He first came to Europe to play for AZ, signed for €600,000 from Cruzeiro, where he barely played and was twice sent out on loan. He scored four goals in 15 Eredivisie games before heading to Italy, where he played only six times as Brescia were relegated, before becoming the team's top scorer in Serie B. Then came Pescara, Torino (on loan) and Latina, where his 15 goals almost saw the team reach the Italian top flight.

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Yet despite his own success, as Escriba said, few teams showed a real interest. But that suited Elche, who didn't have the money to risk signing him outright so they loaned him with a €1.5m purchase option. "Getting him was a huge success," says Escriba.

This summer Elche will buy him outright. It is not that they can now afford to; it's that they can't afford not to. They'll sign him and then they'll sell him. And this time, there will be plenty of teams following him.

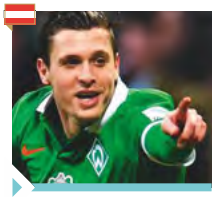
Sid Lowe

JUANFRAN
Age 30, Atletico Madrid & Spain

Attacking right-back who came through the ranks at city rivals Real Madrid but made his name at Osasuna. In Spain's 2014 World Cup squad.

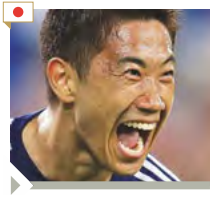
JULIO CESAR
Age 35, Benfica (Por) & Brazil

Seemingly broken mentally and physically by Brazil's 7-1 World Cup humiliation by Germany – but what he has done at Benfica proves otherwise.



Zlatko JUNUZOVIC
Age 27, Werder Bremen (Ger) & Austria

Yugoslav-born Austrian international winger who has shone for struggling Bremen with assists and free-kicks.



Shinji KAGAWA
Age 25, Borussia Dortmund (Ger) & Japan

Midfielder who is now back at his former club after a disappointing spell at Manchester United. He remains a talented footballer.

KAKA
Age 32, Orlando City (USA) & Brazil

Arguably the biggest name to have signed for MLS, the former World Player of the Year is the highest-paid player in its history.

Nikos KALTSAS
Age 24, Veria & Greece

Goalscoring winger who will move to Panathinaikos in the summer. He has played for Greece at under-19 and under-21 level.

Kevin KAMPL
Age 24, Borussia Dortmund (Ger) & Slovenia

Attacking midfielder who moved from Salzburg in January after being named the Austrian league's 2014 player of the year.

Harry KANE
Age 20, Tottenham Hotspur & England

Striker who is the story of the Premier League season, with his rapid rise from Championship loanee to England contender.

Joshua KIMMICH

Age 20, RB Leipzig & Germany

That such uncompromising judges as Bayern Munich's coach, Pep Guardiola, and director of sport, Matthias Sammer, recently moved heaven and earth to snap up the RB Leipzig defensive midfielder for next season is what you might call the ultimate hallmark.

Coming to the end of a two-year loan spell at Leipzig – a voraciously ambitious German second-tier club owned by the Red Bull company – the highly rated Kimmich was supposed to return to his parent club, Stuttgart, in July. But as in most areas of soccer life in Germany, what Bayern want, Bayern generally get. So when the Bavarian aristocrats turned up with a sack of cash (€7million to Stuttgart, €1.5m to RB Leipzig), a five-year deal was swiftly done.

A prominent figure in the Germany side that captured the European Under-19 title in Hungary last year and part of the under-21 set-up since October, Kimmich has certainly not taken the easy option in moving to the Bayern pressure cooker so soon in his career. Yet to play a single minute in the Bundesliga, his football education has far from run its course and, of course, he will face enormous competition for a first-team place in central midfield.

With Philipp Lahm, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Xabi Alonso, Javi Martinez, Thiago Alcantara, Sebastian Rode, Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and Gianluca Gaudino to choose from, Bayern are already awash with engine-room class and to pick his way through this talent logjam will not be easy.

What Kimmich can be sure of, however, is that he will be given every chance to make the grade at the Allianz Arena. Guardiola and Sammer have identified him as a youngster to build a team around long term and Bayern will hope to gradually ease him in, laying the foundations for lift-off in a year or two. All he has to do is stay modest, work hard, do his homework and hope the breaks go his way.

Kimmich unquestionably has all the raw ingredients to be a success. He reads the game well, oozes dynamism and bravery, is strong in the tackle and in the air, and is an exceptional midfield link man, thoughtful and accurate in his passing, imaginative with his final ball and never happier than when taking charge. The only thing he lacks are goals – scoring just three since joining Leipzig in the summer of 2013.

"If he carries on in the same vein, he can be trusted to go all the way," says Germany under-21 coach Horst Hrubesch. "He's a very intelligent footballer with great technique and good speed. He plays with a lot of heart and is a winner."

Nick Bidwell

Nikolas KARELIS
Age 23, Panathinaikos & Greece

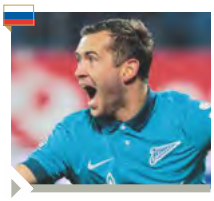
Attacking midfielder or second striker who is set to play a key role for a new-look Greece after scoring on his international debut last autumn.

Loris KARIUS
Age 21, Mainz & Germany

Promising keeper who recently agreed a new contract to stay at Mainz for another three seasons but is still a target of scouts from across Europe.

Robbie KEANE
Age 34, LA Galaxy (USA) & Republic of Ireland

Winner of the 2014 Most Valuable Player award after captaining Galaxy to another MLS title. A natural goalscorer.



Alexander KERZHAKOV
Age 32, Zenit & Russia

Striker who, despite his years, is still a key figure for the national side. The Russian Premier League's all-time leading scorer.

KI Sung-yueng
Age 26, Swansea City (Eng) & South Korea

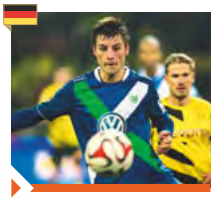
In great form for his club after returning from a perplexing loan spell at Sunderland. A key figure for the Asian Cup Finalists.

Stefan KIESSLING
Age 32, Bayer Leverkusen & Germany

Target man who has been a regular scorer in the Bundesliga but has failed to convince Germany boss Joachim Low of his value.

Davy KLAASSEN
Age 22, Ajax & Holland

Attacking midfielder who was hailed as a wonderkid when he scored on his Ajax debut after 42 seconds. Has played for Holland from under-16 upwards.



Robin KNOCHE
Age 22, Wolfsburg & Germany

Centre-back and one of the Bundesliga's brightest defensive options. Has formed a highly effective partnership with Naldo this season.

KOKE
Age 23, Atletico Madrid & Spain

A midfield product of Atletico's youth system and now the chief creative force. Has become an important part of Spain's post World Cup senior side.

Alexander KOKORIN
Age 24, Dynamo Moscow & Russia

First-choice striker for the national side. Has played all his career at Dynamo, save for a spell at Anzhi in 2013.

Dimitris KOLOVOS
Age 21, Panionios & Greece

Attacking midfielder, widely touted as one of the biggest talents in Greek football. Thriving back at his first club Panionios, on loan from Olympiakos.

Vincent KOMPANY
Age 28, Manchester City (Eng) & Belgium

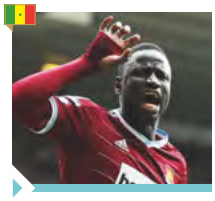
Captain of club and country, he is one of the Premier League's most accomplished central defenders, despite a recent dip in form.

Geoffrey KONDOGBIA
Age 22, Monaco & France

Tall, powerful central midfielder who has represented France at every level from the age of 16. Previously with Sevilla in Spain.

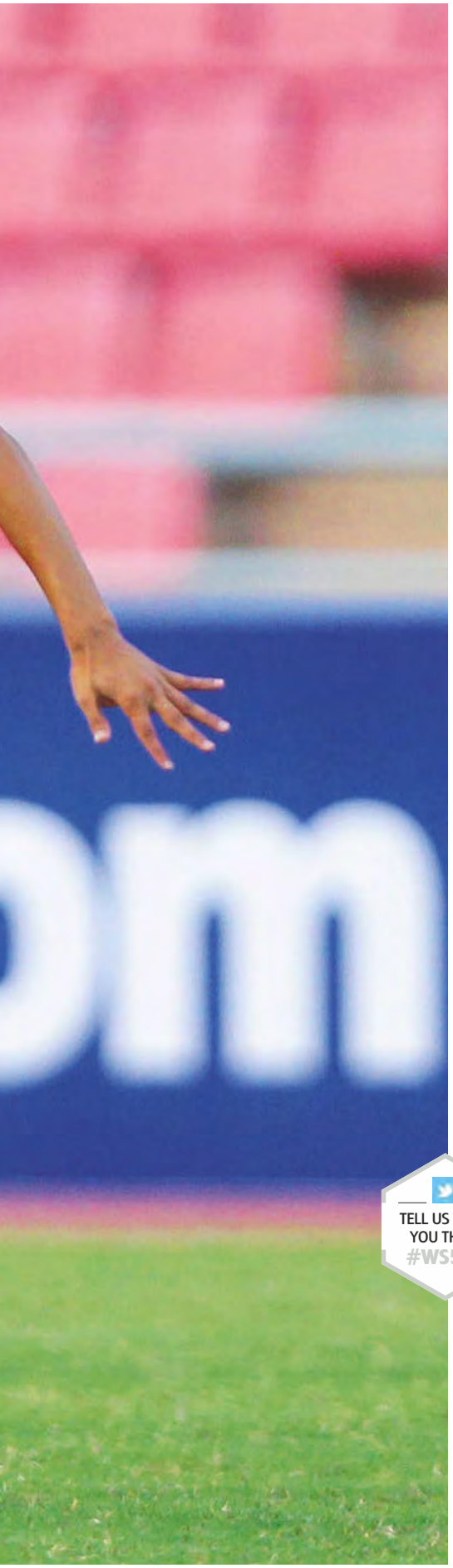
Kalidou KOULIBALY
Age 23, Napoli (Ita) & France

Former Metz youth star, a versatile defender who has been an adept signing for Napoli since moving from Belgium's Genk last summer.



Cheikhou KOUYATE
Age 25, West Ham United (Eng) & Senegal

Powerful midfielder who has quickly adapted to the Premier League after a summer move from Anderlecht.



LEE Seung-woo

Age 17, Barcelona (Spa) & South Korea

Lee Seung-woo has yet to appear in the Barcelona first team and there is no chance he will do so in 2015. The Korean is the player Barca signed at the age of 16 and who ended up costing them a global transfer ban.

In April last year, FIFA charged the club with breaching article 19 of its "Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players" rules that are designed to prevent the international transfer of players under the age of 18.

Lee was one of 10 under-age players signed by Barca between 2009 and 2013, along with two more Koreans, a Nigerian, a Cameroonian and a Paraguayan, among others. Despite protesting that other clubs, such as Chelsea, were also engaged in similar activities, Barcelona's appeal to CAS failed in December 2014 and a transfer ban was applied for two windows: January 2015 and summer 2015.

Lee, who has inevitably been dubbed the "Korean Messi", was scouted while playing for his country at the Danone Cup, an international youth tournament in South Africa in 2010, where he was the top scorer. It was not long before he moved to La Masia, the former Catalan farmhouse that now houses Barcelona's academy.

The global transfer ban means he is now banned from playing for Barcelona until he turns 18 in January 2016. In the meantime, he is only allowed only to play international friendlies and tournaments for his country.

Since the ban came into effect, Real Madrid have been among the clubs who have launched bids to acquire Lee, but they have been knocked back. Madrid have upped their pursuit of young talent in the wake of Barcelona's transfer ban, with the January 2015 capture of Norwegian teenager Martin Odegaard an important statement of intent. However, Lee's father insisted that his son would stay in Barcelona to complete his football education.

Ironically, the transfer ban means Barcelona will have to rely on their existing squad, plus newcomers from the youth ranks – where Lee was one of the leading lights. It was only by initiating a fruitless appeal process last summer that the club were able to postpone the ban and spent more than £100million on the likes of Luis Suarez, Thomas Vermaelen, Ivan Rakitic and Alen Halilovic. However, over the course of 2015, there are likely to be opportunities for youngsters Sergi Samper, Halilovic, Munir and Alex Grimaldo, while Gerard Deulofeu and Denis Suarez could be recalled from loan spells at Sevilla.

Lee, though, will have to wait until 2016 before he can resume his Barcelona career.

John Holmesdale

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Christoph KRAMER

Age 24, Borussia Monchengladbach & Germany

Central midfielder who was substituted in the first half of the 2014 World Cup Final after suffering concussion.

Matias KRANEVITTER

Age 21, River Plate & Argentina

Linchpin of the River side, he's the archetypal Argentinian number five: a defensive midfielder who can step forward and create.

Toni KROOS

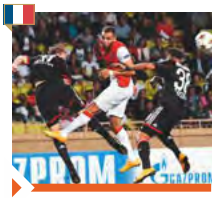
Age 25, Real Madrid (Spa) & Germany

Central midfielder, World Cup winner and now a Real Madrid *galactico*. Combines vision, technique and industry.

Grzegorz KRYCHOWIAK

Age 25, Sevilla (Spa) & Poland

Tough-tackling holding midfielder excelling at Sevilla. Nicknamed "the plumber" when at Reims (because he does the dirty work).



Layvin KURZAWA

Age 22, Monaco & France

Attacking left-back who graduated from France under-21s to make his senior international debut in November. Born in France to a Polish mother.

Dirk KUYT

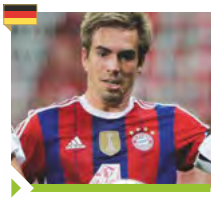
Age 34, Fenerbahce (Tur) & Holland

Versatile forward who is enjoying his club football in Turkey after announcing his international retirement.

Alexandre LACAZETTE

Age 23, Lyon & France

The hottest property in French football right now. A fearsome striker who currently leads Ligue 1's scoring charts.



Philipp LAHM

Age 31, Bayern Munich & Germany

Ended his international career after leading Germany to World Cup triumph. Full-back or midfielder, he broke an ankle in November.

Erik LAMELA
Age 23, Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) & Argentina

Scorer of spectacular "rabona" goals and seen as one of Argentina's brightest hopes, despite his lack of starts for Spurs.

Aymeric LAPORTE
Age 23, Athletic Bilbao (Spa) & France

Highly-rated French under-21 international centre-back. Only the second Frenchman – after Bixente Lizarazu – to play for Athletic.

Ezequiel LAVEZZI
Age 29, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Argentina

Right-sided forward who has not had the best of seasons at PSG but could attract huge attention if he comes on the transfer market.

LEANDRO DAMIAO
Age 25, Cruzeiro & Brazil

Top scorer at the 2012 Olympics, after which his career stalled. Starting again with Cruzeiro.

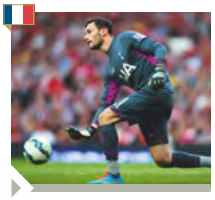
PROFILED
LEE SEUNG-WOO
ON PAGE 64

Robert LEWANDOWSKI
Age 26, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Poland

Striker who has not been the success at Bayern that many had hoped, but he has still been a regular scorer.

Adem LJAJIC
Age 23, Roma (Ita) & Serbia

Signed by Roma as a replacement for the Spurs-bound Erik Lamela and has been one of the Italian side's top attacking performers this season.



Hugo LLORIS
Age 28, Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) & France

Captain of the French national side who has been in excellent form for Spurs, prompting talk of a big-money transfer.

Nicolas LODEIRO
Age 25, Boca Juniors (Arg) & Uruguay

Midfielder who recently took on the number 10 shirt at Boca after a spell in Brazil. Had an unsuccessful spell in Holland with Ajax.

LUCAS MOURA

Age 22, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Brazil

It will come as no surprise to Alex Ferguson that Lucas Moura has established himself as one of the key performers in a Paris Saint-Germain side bursting at the seams with talent. The former Manchester United manager was frothing at the mouth as long ago as August 2012 when PSG stole Sao Paulo's teenage Brazilian midfielder from under his nose.

"When somebody's paying £45million for a 19-year-old boy you have to say the game's gone mad," said Ferguson at the time. Of course, you do wonder what he'd have to say about his own club shelling out £59.7m for Angel Di Maria last year. But it might be fair to assume that United would have done far better business handing Sao Paulo the cash for Moura when they had the chance.

In his two-and-a-half years in the French capital, Moura has clocked up over 100 first-team appearances, including a lung-busting 53 matches last term. True, he has had the critics purring this season with any number of eye-catching displays on the right, but it has to be said that as recently as last April there were still plenty of nagging doubts about his long-term prospects in France.

There was no doubting his talent, with close control to die for and an impressive turn of pace.

But PSG coach Laurent Blanc wasn't altogether happy. "Lucas does amazing things, but he also fades out of games," said Blanc. "He's got great talent in those legs, so I expect more incredible things from him. But he also needs to track back more and be more consistent."

If that was something of a wake-up call, then the 22-year-old got the message loud and clear. Moura stepped up to the plate, improved his consistency and work rate and has certainly given his boss plenty to smile about this season. By February this year he had already beaten his goals tally for the previous campaign, with seven strikes compared to five, and in the process has become a regular starter. However, his upward trajectory was cruelly halted in February when he was ruled out for four weeks with a tricky injury to a right adductor that needed an operation, putting an end to his immediate chances of adding to a current haul of 31 Brazil caps.

There has been some talk of Moura leaving PSG but, given his impressive showing this campaign, that possibility seems less and less likely.

"I've not had any contact with any other club," he says. "I'm very happy in Paris, both as a city and as a club. I want to create history here and I want to stay for a long, long time."

Howard Johnson

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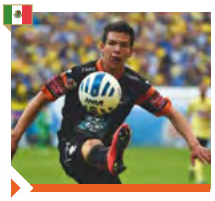
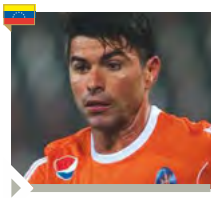


Hirving LOZANO
Age 19, Pachuca & Mexico

Winger who was the standout performer for Mexico in the CONCACAF Under-20 World Cup qualifiers when he finished as joint top scorer.

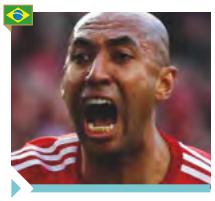


Franklin LUCENA
Age 34, Deportivo La Guiara & Venezuela

No-frills central midfielder who has been one of the most reliable players in the Venezuelan league for over a decade.

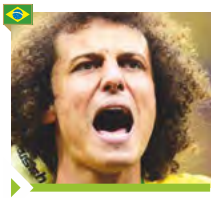
LUIS FABIANO
Age 34, Sao Paulo & Brazil

Veteran international centre-forward, who was first choice in the 2010 World Cup and is still hunting more silverware towards the end of his career.



LUISAO
Age 34, Benfica (Por) & Brazil

A symbol of Benfica and an oddity in the club's contemporary history given his loyalty to the club – despite exit rumours every summer.

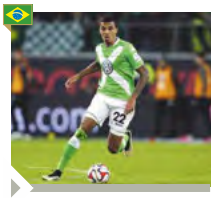


David LUIZ
Age 27, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Brazil

The world's most expensive defender after being sold by Chelsea for a fee in the region of £50m last summer.

LUIZ ADRIANO
Age 27, Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) & Brazil

Outstanding in last autumn's Champions League group stages, scoring five goals in one match against BATE of Belarus.



LUIZ GUSTAVO
Age 27, Wolfsburg (Ger) & Brazil

Midfielder whose influence at Wolfsburg may have waned but he has still been included in all of Dunga's post World Cup squads.

Romelu LUKAKU
Age 21, Everton (Eng) & Belgium

Powerful centre-forward who has yet to repay his £28m transfer fee for Everton but remains a key figure for the Belgian national side.

Nemanja MATIC

Age 26, Chelsea (Eng) & Serbia

In January 2011, Nemanja Matic was informed that he would be moving to Benfica as part of Chelsea's £25million deal to land Brazilian defender David Luiz. At the time, the chances of Chelsea paying £22m to bring the Serbian midfielder back to Stamford Bridge three years later was on a par with Jose Mourinho's prospects of landing the Nobel Peace Prize.

Yet by early 2015, a year after he returned to Chelsea in just such a deal, Matic was being hailed as the club's player of the season, a brilliant midfield enforcer and a leading contender for the end-of-season Footballer of the Year award.

It was not always thus. Signed by Chelsea as a 21-year-old from Slovakian club Kosice, he had trouble with injuries and was sent on loan to Vitesse, Chelsea's preferred loan partners in Holland. The then-manager Carlo Ancelotti had blooded youngsters such as Josh McEachran in the first team, but there was no opportunity for a creative central midfielder like Matic.

"I was very young," he told *The Independent* last year. "In my position at that time were big players, Ballack, Lampard and Essien. I came here injured – I was four months out – so it was difficult for me. The Premier League is not easy for young players because it is very hard, very tough.

"Most of the players are very tall. In Portugal I used to play against small players and I won every ball. Here it is more difficult."

Matic was very much the make-weight in the Luiz deal. Benfica, interested in taking Patrick Van Aanholt or Jeffrey Bruma, were told by Chelsea that neither Dutchman was for sale. These days Van Aanholt is at relegation-threatened Sunderland, where injury has disrupted his season, while Bruma is back in Holland at PSV.

In Portugal, Matic was reinvented as a defensive midfielder by Benfica coach Jorge Jesus and he displayed all the qualities required by Mourinho as he set about remodelling Chelsea – placing function over form – during his second spell in charge

"If I had been here – a left-footed player, 6ft 4in tall – a midfield player like that would never, never leave," says Mourinho. "Chelsea were brave in bringing him back. Probably in the future if this club does business with a young player, they will keep control. But they had so many managers in those years it was difficult to have a philosophy."

Since Mourinho's first spell in charge, Chelsea's recruitment policy has evolved considerably.

More than 30 players have been sent out on loan this season and the sales of such as Luiz, Romelu Lukaku, Kevin De Bruyne and Andre Schurrle have generated substantial revenues that have helped the club comply with financial fairplay regulations

Matic may have cost millions to bring back, but it appears to have been a price worth paying.

John Holmesdale

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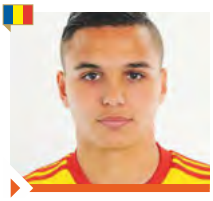
Mario MANDZUKIC
Age 28, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & Croatia

Signed to replace Diego Costa and has experienced a solid first season in Spain as the club's top scorer.

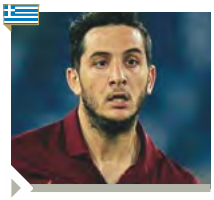


Cristian MANEA
Age 17, Viitorul & Romania

Right-back who has enjoyed a miraculous rise in the last six months, making his international debut and agreeing a deal to join Chelsea this summer.

Giannis MANIATIS
Age 28, Olympiakos & Greece

Defensive midfielder and captain of his club side. Was a key figure for his country at both the 2012 European Championship and the 2014 World Cup.



Kostas MANOLAS
Age 23, Roma (Ita) & Greece

Centre-back who left Olympiakos last summer and has quickly impressed with his performances in Serie A for his new side.

MARCELO
Age 26, Real Madrid (Spa) & Brazil

Attacking left-back who was made one of the scapegoats for Brazil's World Cup humiliation but is now back in the squad.

Lazar MARKOVIC
Age 21, Liverpool (Eng) & Serbia

Midfielder who excelled in a single season with Benfica has quickly adapted to a new wing-back role at Liverpool during this campaign.

MARQUINHOS
Age 20, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Brazil

Central defender who club coach Laurent Blanc says is the "future of PSG". In the plans of returning Brazil boss Dunga.

Anthony MARTIAL
Age 19, Monaco & France

Much talked about striker who has played for France at all levels. Switched to Monaco from Lyon in 2013 for a fee of €3m plus add-ons.

Jackson MARTINEZ
Age 28, Porto (Por) & Colombia

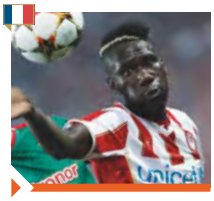
Centre-forward who is upholding Porto's fine tradition of unearthing outstanding South American goalscorers.

Obafemi MARTINS
Age 30, Seattle Sounders (USA) & Nigeria

Enjoying a revival of his career in America after it looked to have petered out during his time in Russia.

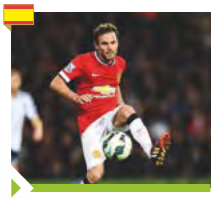
Javier MASCHERANO
Age 30, Barcelona (Spa) & Argentina

Raised as a central midfielder in Argentina but now more likely to be found playing at centre-back.



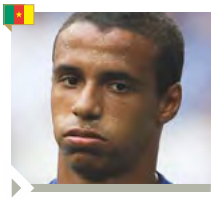
Arthur MASUAKU
Age 21, Olympiakos (Gre) & France

Under-21 left-back who has impressed during his first season in Greece, prompting much talk of a move to Serie A.



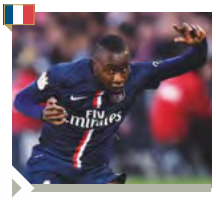
Juan MATA
Age 26, Manchester United (Eng) & Spain

Midfielder who has struggled to find a central role under Louis Van Gaal but remains a talented playmaker.



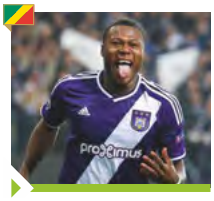
Joel MATIP
Age 23, Schalke (Ger) & Cameroon

Defensive midfielder or centre-back. Born in Germany but has played for Cameroon at the last two World Cup finals.



Blaise MATUIDI
Age 27, Paris Saint-Germain & France

One of the most consistent midfielders in French football, for both club and country. Joined PSG from Saint-Etienne.



Chancel MBEMBA
Age 20, Anderlecht (Blg) & Congo

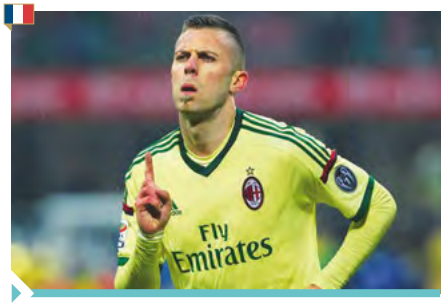
Impressed at the African Nations Cup. Confusion surrounds his date of birth, which is officially listed as August 1994.

Alexander MEIER
Age 32, Eintracht Frankfurt & Germany

Veteran forward who is enjoying his 11th and best season for Eintracht, leading the Bundesliga scoring charts.

Edison MENDEZ
Age 36, El Nacional & Ecuador

The only man to take part in all three of Ecuador's World Cup campaigns, a versatile midfielder with a rocket shot now winding down his career back home.



Jeremy MENEZ
Age 27, Milan (Ita) & France

Attacking midfielder who is thriving back in Serie A after three seasons with PSG, during which he drifted out of the national side.

Bernard MENSAH
Age 20, Vitoria Guimaraes (Por) & Ghana

Ghanaian goalscoring midfielder with a big future. An important figure in the rise of Vitoria in Portugal this season.

Dries MERTENS
Age 27, Napoli (Ita) & Belgium

Fast, clever winger who creates and scores. Rejected by Anderlecht for being too small, he starred in Holland with PSV and has continued to impress in Italy.

Thomas MEUNIER
Age 23, Club Brugge & Belgium

Former under-21 right-back who scored on his club debut and is on the fringes of the Belgium squad. Linked with a transfer to a bigger league.

Max MEYER
Age 19, Schalke & Germany

Skilful, speedy attacking midfielder who made a dramatic impact for Schalke last season, leading to a first senior cap for Germany.

Lionel MESSI

Age 27, Barcelona (Spa) & Argentina

Barcelona have been playing a different style under Luis Enrique this season but – with a more direct approach and a front three of Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez – it has not always been plain sailing for the new coach. Defender Jeremy Mathieu revealed to French radio that Messi and Enrique had clashed on the training ground during pre-season, saying: "Leo threw a tantrum. There was some friction, some things were said.

"It happens at every club, but because this is Barcelona it's big news."

In January, Messi's absence from Barcelona's traditional annual open-training session was explained by the club as "gastroenteritis". Unfortunately, midfielder Xavi had inadvertently revealed in a pre-recorded interview that gastroenteritis is often "an excuse for when something else is going on". Messi's activity on

social media later that day attracted considerable interest. His decision to follow Chelsea's official Instagram account as well as players Filipe Luis and Thibaut Courtois was taken as a sign of the growing tension.

Messi's mental strength is often overlooked in the rush to praise his goals and multiple assists.

"Of course he has an ego. Do you think you do that without having an ego?" said Thierry Henry after watching Barcelona beat Manchester City at Camp Nou, where only a brilliant display by goalkeeper Joe Hart prevented a humiliation of the English champions.

Would Messi's ego ever prompt him to leave the club that has nurtured him since the age of 13? The new Premier League TV deal, which will boost the coffers of England's leading clubs by around £100million each per season, makes such talk less fanciful that it sounds.

John Holmesdale

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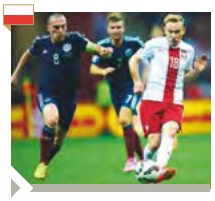
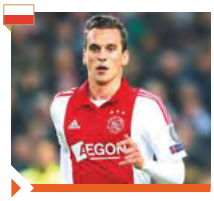


Sebastian MILA
Age 32, Lechia Gdansk & Poland

Midfielder who has been an outstanding performer in the Polish league in recent seasons, earning an international recall.



Arek MILIK
Age 21, Ajax (Hol) & Poland

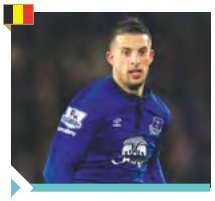
One of Polish football's brightest talents, on loan in Holland from Bayer Leverkusen. Scored in Poland's 2-0 Euro 2016 qualifying win against Germany.

Diego MILITO
Age 35, Racing & Argentina

Now back in Argentina, playing for his boyhood club. Scored both goals for Internazionale in the 2010 Champions League Final win over Bayern Munich.

Alexander MILOSEVIC
Age 23, Besiktas (Tur) & Sweden

Swedish defender who was on the radar of a number of top clubs while at AIK, but moved to Turkey in January.



Kevin MIRALLAS
Age 27, Everton (Eng) & Belgium

Versatile forward who has been a valuable weapon for Everton but is keen to move to a Champions League club this summer.

MIRANDA
Age 30, Atletico Madrid (Spa) & Brazil

Centre-back who has played a central role in Atletico's successes of recent seasons. Linked with a big-money transfer to England.

Aleksandar MITROVIC
Age 20, Anderlecht (Blg) & Serbia

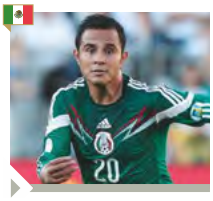
Raw and hot-headed forward who has excelled in Belgium over the past two seasons.

Luka MODRIC
Age 29, Real Madrid (Spa) & Croatia

One of the world's best playmakers. His injury absence through December 2014 and early 2015 was linked to Madrid's dip in form.

Jefferson MONTERO
Age 25, Swansea City (Eng) & Ecuador

The winger took time to settle in the Premier League but will be crucial for Ecuador at the Copa America.



Luis MONTES
Age 28, Leon & Mexico

Midfielder who broke a leg just before last year's World Cup when he was supposed to be Mexico's number 10. He's back now at a very good level.

Alvaro MORATA
Age 22, Juventus (Ita) & Spain

The striker was squeezed out of Real Madrid last summer but has thrived since moving to Italy, despite the burden of a €20m price tag.

Hector MORENO
Age 27, Espanyol (Spa) & Mexico

Left-sided centre-back whose performances in La Liga and Mexico's national side have alerted a number of Europe's leading clubs.

Thiago MOTTA
Age 32, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Italy

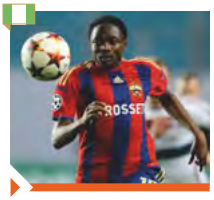
Midfielder who won two caps for Brazil before switching his allegiance – his paternal grandfather being Italian.

Thomas MULLER
Age 25, Bayern Munich & Germany

Golden Boot winner who has 10 World Cup finals goals to his name and he can easily surpass Miroslav Klose's world record.

Luis MURIEL
Age 23, Sampdoria (Ita) & Colombia

Highly rated forward who left Udinese in the January transfer window in a €12m deal, having moved to Europe in 2010.



Ahmed MUSA
Age 22, CSKA Moscow (Rus) & Nigeria

Pacey dribbler who made the move to Russia from Holland. Plays a key attacking role for Nigeria's national side.

Fernando MUSLERA
Age 28, Galatasaray (Tur) & Uruguay

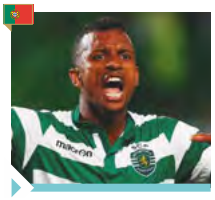
First-choice keeper who was a key figure in Uruguay's 2011 Copa America victory and the 2010 World Cup.

Yoshinori MUTO
Age 22, Tokyo & Japan

Goalscoring midfielder who is one of the brightest prospects in the J.League and has now established himself in the Japanese national side.

NALDO
Age 32, Wolfsburg (Ger) & Brazil

Giant centre-back who has been a towering figure in Wolfsburg's recent progress in the Bundesliga and their push for Champions League football.

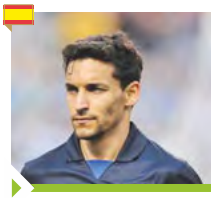


NANI
Age 28, Sporting Lisbon & Portugal

Proof of how a step backwards can boost a career. Superb since returning to his first club on loan from Manchester United.

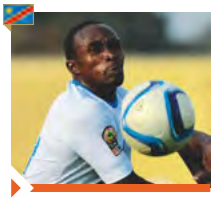
Samir NASRI
Age 27, Manchester City (Eng) & France

Frozen out by France and has drifted in and out at City this season. But his talent (and ego) will see him return at some stage.



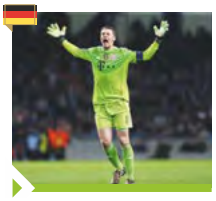
Jesus NAVAS
Age 29, Manchester City (Eng) & Spain

The right-winger has dropped out of contention for the Spanish national team but remains a key figure for City.



Firmin NDOMBE MUBELE
Age 20, AS Vita & DR Congo

CAF's current Africa-based player of the year. A move to North Africa or Francophone Europe is on the cards for the quick striker.



Manuel NEUER
Age 28, Bayern Munich & Germany

Outstanding, dominant figure for club and country. Sweeper-keeper with brilliant reflexes and shot-stopping skills.

Radja NAINGGOLAN

Age 26, Roma (Ita) & Belgium

Usually the first over the barricades and the last man standing, Roma's all-action midfield warrior Radja Nainggolan has never been one to go about his business unobtrusively. Seeking the shadows or hoping for a quiet life is just not his way.

Already a conspicuous figure thanks to his multi-coloured mohican hairstyle, the Belgium international loves nothing better than to be in the thick of the action. To all intents and purposes he is the prototype of the modern midfielder; at one and the same time he is a ball-winner, dynamic

runner, slick passer and decent finisher. A grafter. A fighter. A winner.

Since quitting Germinal Beerschot for Serie B Piacenza at the age of 16, the Antwerp-born son of a Flemish mother and Indonesian father has carved out a niche for himself as one of the most dynamic players in Italian football, and at his two subsequent peninsula postings – Sardinian outfit Cagliari (January 2010 to January 2014) and current club Roma – he has come to enjoy cult hero status.

"Both Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City wanted him, but I did a deal for Roma to take him," declares former Cagliari president Massimo Cellino shortly after allowing Nainggolan to join Roma early last year on a six-month loan deal which was later made permanent. "He didn't want to go. I had to force him. A year ago, Zenit offered €30million and Juventus bid €20m. And Radja came in the following day and extended his contract with us. But he couldn't stay here. How could he grow in a stadium with four cats and in a team without ambition? By loaning him to Roma for €3m, I was giving them a present."

In marked contrast to his five-star profile in Italy, the left-sided or central midfielder does not provoke anything like the same sort of adulation back home in Belgium. The fact that he left for Italy at such an early age has, in many ways, turned him into an "out of sight, out of mind" figure. Despite making his international debut as long ago as May 2009, in a Kirin Cup match against Chile, he only has a handful of caps and did not go any further than the standby list for last year's World Cup.

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One school of thought regarding his lack of opportunities at international level is that the Belgian federation have been deterred by his public image as an unrepentant bad boy. Last year a furious row with his wife in the street led to the police being called and uncomplimentary headlines aplenty. He far too often oversteps the mark with his social media comments – rarely failing to respond when trolls target him – and recently sparked more controversy by appearing to imply that a number of Roma team-mates were not pulling their weight.

No wonder he is dubbed "The Ninja".

Nick Bidwell

Dennis PRAET

Age 20, Anderlecht & Belgium

The 23rd Anderlecht player to win Belgium's Player of the Year award, Praet might only have topped the 2014 poll by the narrowest of margins – finishing a mere five votes ahead of runner-up, Club Brugge midfielder Victor Vazquez – but he thoroughly deserved the *Gouden Schoen* ("Golden Boot") all the same.

After impressing on the left wing in the second-half of last season, and making an excellent contribution to yet another national title for his club, he has proved even more valuable this term as a number 10, becoming in the space of just a few months the Brussels side's undisputed leader, the individual that his team-mates principally look to for their inspiration and strategy.

This season, his fourth on the Parc Astrid payroll following a move from Genk in 2010, has turned out to be the campaign when everything clicked into place for the native of the famous Flemish beer-producing town of Leuven. More confident, better in his decision making and revelling in his new-found field marshal responsibility, Praet has proved the epitome of consistency and high standards, in sparkling creative and goalscoring form domestically and equally to the fore on Champions League duty.

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"Dennis is enormously important to our team," declares Anderlecht general manager Herman Van Holsbeeck. "He was very influential on the wing when we won in last season's championship play-offs and is now establishing himself as a modern number 10. Besnik [Anderlecht coach Besnik Hasi] has taught him to work after losing the ball – and how well that's worked out.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm going to do all I can to keep Dennis with us for at least another year.

"When you are a 20-year-old Golden Boot winner and have just broken into the Belgian national team [making his debut in November] and have looked good in the Champions League, you know you are going to have clubs with budgets

four or five times that of Anderlecht knocking on your door. We're a big club in Belgium, but with a budget of only €40million, we're small fry on the European scale."

Praet, whose contract with *Les Mauves* runs until June 2017, has been persistently linked with Dortmund and several top Premier League clubs, though former Anderlecht midfield great Per Zetterberg – who twice picked up the Golden Boot himself in 1993 and 1997 – believes the young man has the profile to prosper in the technically driven La Liga.

Describing himself as "very calm and maybe a little too timid", Praet soon will have a very important choice to make. Stick or twist. Continuity or adventure.

Nick Bidwell

NEYMAR
Age 23, Barcelona (Spa) & Brazil

Has already made 300 appearances for Santos and Barcelona. Named Brazil captain by Dunga after the 2014 World Cup humiliation.

Saul NIGUEZ
Age 20, Atletico Madrid & Spain

Under-21 midfielder who has impressed deputising for Koke at Atletico this season after returning from a loan at Rayo Vallecano.

Clinton NJIE
Age 21, Lyon (Fra) & Cameroon

Forward who has been tipped for a long career in the Cameroon national side despite not yet playing regularly for Lyon.

Nicolas NKOULOU
Age 25, Marseille (Fra) & Cameroon

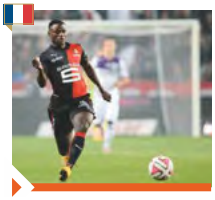
Central defender and Cameroon captain. Popular figure with Marseille fans but is on the Premier League and La Liga radars.

Christian NOBOA
Age 29, PAOK (Gre) & Ecuador

Midfielder who moved to Greece in January after eight years in Russia with Rubin Kazan and Dynamo Moscow. Key figure in the national team.

NOLITO
Age 28, Celta Vigo & Spain

Forward who failed to break through at Barca B under Luis Enrique but is now thriving at Vigo and earned a senior Spain debut in November.



Paul-Georges NTEP
Age 22 Rennes & France

Cameroon-born highly rated under-21 striker who is making plenty of waves with Rennes this season since a move from Auxerre.

Orjan NYLAND
Age 24, Molde & Norway

Highly-rated keeper who has been linked with a transfer to a number of Premier League clubs. Bronze medallist at the 2013 Euro Under-21s.

Lucas OCAMPOS
Age 20, Marseille (Fra) & Argentina

Winger and former River Plate wonder boy who has linked up with his countryman Marcelo Bielsa at Marseille on loan from Monaco.

Martin ODEGAARD
Age 16, Real Madrid (Spa) & Norway

Norway's youngest-ever international, he was signed by Real Madrid in January and placed in the B team.

Shinji OKAZAKI
Age 28, Mainz (Ger) & Japan

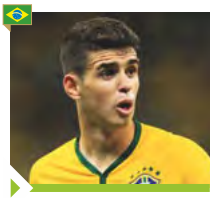
The most successful Japanese forward in European club football, he has scored more than 30 Bundesliga goals for Stuttgart and now Mainz.

Rubin OKOTIE
Age 27, 1860 Munich (Ger) & Austria

Striker in fine form for second-division 1860 this season. Born in Pakistan to Nigerian and Austrian parents and raised in Austria.

Ogenyi ONAZI
Age 22 Lazio (Ita) & Nigeria

Central midfielder who featured in all Nigeria's games at Brazil 2014. Has excelled at Lazio since moving to Italy after playing in the Under-17 World Cup.



OSCAR
Age 23, Chelsea (Eng) & Brazil

Creative midfielder whose defensive qualities have made him a vital piece of the Mourinho jigsaw at Stamford Bridge. A key figure for Brazil.

Dani OSVALDO
Age 29, Boca Juniors (Arg) & Italy

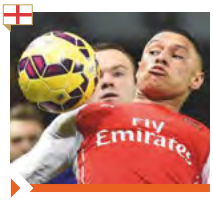
Despite a troubled past 18 months, the forward still has star appeal. His signing in January was a major coup for the Argentinian league.

Nicolas OTAMENDI
Age 27, Valencia (Spa) & Argentina

Centre-back in fine form for Valencia this season after a spell on loan at Atletico Mineiro in Brazil.

Romulo OTERO
Age 22, Caracas & Venezuela

Attacking midfielder with tricky dribbling skills who is also a free-kick specialist. A leading member of a promising new Venezuelan generation.



Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN
Age 21, Arsenal & England

He has overcome injury setbacks to make steady progress, moving from being a winger to a versatile attacking midfielder.

Mesut OZIL
Age 26, Arsenal (Eng) & Germany

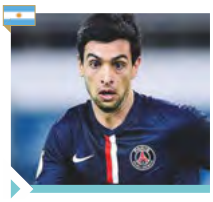
Criticised for below-par displays since a £42m move from Real Madrid, the number 10 still produces an impressive number of assists.

Leandro PAREDES
Age 20, Roma (Ita) & Argentina

Former Boca Juniors starlet who moved to Italy last summer. The attacking midfielder has so far been used sparingly by Roma, but remains a huge talent.

Dani PAREJO
Age 25, Valencia & Spain

Former Real Madrid trainee who is now firmly established at Valencia and has been top scorer in their pursuit of a Champions League place.



Javier PASTORE
Age 25, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Argentina

Argentinian midfielder who is beginning to fulfil his huge potential in his fourth season in Paris. Previously with Palermo in Serie A.

Alexandre PATO
Age 25, Sao Paulo & Brazil

Wonderkid striker for whom fame perhaps came too soon while at Milan. Moved back home to Corinthians but has done better on loan at Sao Paulo.

Dmitri PAYET
Age 27, Marseille & France

Attacking midfielder who has provided more assists this season than any other player in Europe's top leagues as his club challenge for the Ligue 1 crown.

PEDRO
Age 27, Barcelona & Spain

Forward or winger who has played a major role at Camp Nou but rarely gets the praise he deserves. Contracted until 2016 but may leave this summer.

Graziano PELLE
Age 29, Southampton (Eng) & Italy

Journeyman striker who hit form in Holland at Feyenoord with 50 goals in 57 games and has continued in England this season.

PEPE
Age 32, Real Madrid (Spa) & Portugal

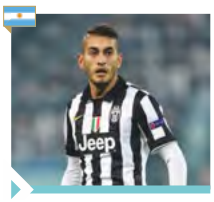
Powerful Brazil-born centre-back whose gamesmanship and hard-man attitude have detracted from his fine footballing qualities.

Oribe PERALTA
Age 31, America & Mexico

Veteran striker who played in the World Cup and spearheads America, who consider themselves the "Ferrari" of the Mexican league this season.

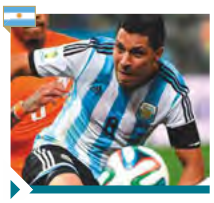
Gaston PEREIRO
Age 19, Nacional & Uruguay

Montevideo-born lanky left-footed attacking midfielder who has been dubbed by some as a Uruguayan Socrates. His country's big hope for the future.



Roberto PEREYRA
Age 24, Juventus (Ita) & Argentina

Former River Plate prodigy whose displays for Juventus, on loan from Udinese, have earned him a place in Argentina's senior side.



Enzo PEREZ
Age 29, Valencia (Spa) & Argentina

The midfielder's club form for Benfica earned him a 2014 World Cup spot with Argentina. Joined Valencia in January.

PAULO ANDRE

Age 31, Cruzeiro & Brazil

Now with reigning Brazilian champions Cruzeiro, Paulo Andre can point to a perfectly respectable CV as a solid and constructive centre-back. He has also played in France and China, given excellent service to Atletico Paranaense and was an important member of the Corinthians side that won national, continental and world titles in a golden spell from 2010 to 2012.

But it is his activities off the field that make him most noteworthy. If the quiet efficiency of his defending can give him a cultured air, the impression is more than reinforced by the man.

A voracious reader, he published a footballer's diary of the 2011 season, full of thoughtful reflections on his chosen profession. During a lengthy injury in France he taught himself to paint and has staged an exhibition of his work with the proceeds going to charity. And his intelligence has also been placed at the service of the Brazilian game as one of the leaders behind the *Bom Senso* ("common sense") movement – a player-led initiative aimed at improving an industry which currently operates ludicrously below potential.

He has been brave enough to stick his head over the parapet and make stinging criticisms of the CBF and those who run Brazilian football. "It is time for us to stop being useful innocents," he wrote last year in a message to fellow players. "We've reached the height of lack of awareness and of exploitation.

"Everything seems normal to us, routine, part of the world we inhabit. We say to each other, 'ah, forget about it, it's always been like that...' And some of the directors have reached the limit of sharp practice, in a mentality where they try to take the maximum advantage from every situation without a thought for those around them or the society in which they live."

At the start of this year he seemed set to join Orlando City in MLS as many believed that Brazilian clubs would consider him too hot to handle, too much of an anti-establishment figure to be given a contract.

It is, then, greatly to the credit of Cruzeiro that they have proved such fears were unjustified and taken him to Belo Horizonte – although, in truth, the clubs themselves would be the biggest beneficiaries of the changes in the structure and calendar of Brazilian football that are being proposed by Paulo Andre and his colleagues.

At a fascinating moment in the country's football, where the World Cup debacle has brought some of the flaws painfully to the surface, it will be interesting to see what kind of contribution he makes to the debate now that he has moved back to Brazil. His should be one of the voices to listen out for in 2015.

Tim Vickery

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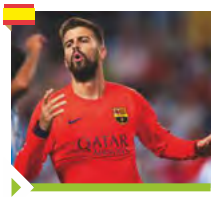
Omar PEREZ
Age 33, Santa Fe (Col) & Argentina

Did not make the grade with Boca Juniors in his homeland, but has been a key figure in Colombian football for over a decade.

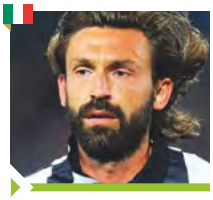
Pablo PIATTI
Age 25, Valencia (Spa) & Argentina

An Estudiantes youth product, the diminutive left-sided attacker has been at the forefront of Valencia's resurgence this season.



Gerard PIQUE
Age 28, Barcelona & Spain

Relations have been strained with coach Luis Enrique this season but he is still a vital part of Barca's defence. Eloquent on and off the pitch.



Andrea PIRLO
Age 35, Juventus & Italy

Veteran midfielder who continues to excel as a "quarter-back" playmaker. Reversed his decision, made after the World Cup, to retire from the national team.

Miralem PJANIC
Age 24, Roma (Ita) & Bosnia

Midfield playmaker coveted by a number of top clubs. Played for Luxembourg's youth side when his family settled there after the Yugoslav civil war.

Paul POGBA
Age 22, Juventus (Ita) & France

The complete midfield package. Tough, dynamic and skilful, he is set to command a huge transfer fee this summer.

PROFILED
DENNIS PRAET
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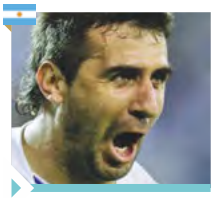

Lucas PRATTO
Age 26, Atletico Mineiro (Bra) & Argentina

Strong, mobile striker who moved to Brazil after making his name in Chile and shining for Velez Sarsfield in his homeland.

Alan PULIDO
Age 24, Levediakos (Gre) & Mexico

First Mexican player to challenge its league on a transfer issue. Went AWOL over an alleged fake signature tying him to Tigres until 2016.

RAFA SILVA

Age 21, Braga & Portugal

Any fledgling Portuguese player struggling to make an impact should take inspiration from the way the *Seleccao* and Braga winger overcame the obstacles he faced early in his career.

A native of the town of Barreiro on the opposite bank of the Tagus river to the capital Lisbon, the youngster's talents as a footballer went singularly unnoticed by every prominent club in the south of the country. He had to make do with a place in a the youth set-up of minor Lisbon side Alverca, where, incidentally, he lined up alongside another future Portugal international in Ivan Cavaleiro, who is currently on loan at Deportivo La Coruna from Benfica.

During his formative years at Alverca, from the age of 10 to 18, not once did a bigger club come in for him. But he continued to persevere, and after heading north in 2011 to join Feirense he suddenly began to make headway, first impressing for the youth team, then emerging in 2012-13 as one of the most exciting youngsters in the Portuguese second division, bristling with livewire creativity and assured finishing.

"From his very first day, I could see he had immense potential," says former Feirense coach Quim Machado. "He was a natural, born with great talent."

His battle against indifference now definitively won, Rafa Silva was snapped up by leading Primeira Liga side Braga and impressed so much that by the end of his first top-flight season he was a full international and in Portugal's 23 for the World Cup in Brazil, albeit in a non-playing role.

While his coaches at Braga – first that wily old fox Jesualdo Ferreira, then current boss Sergio Conceicao – have generally wound him up and let him loose on the left wing, he has the versatility to slot anywhere in the attacking third and Machado is convinced he will end up as a number 10.

"He's playing well at the moment out wide, but I think he can offer even more in an advanced central position," argues Machado. "Players like him, like Luis Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo, cannot have their freedom restricted.

"It goes without saying that he will lose the ball from time to time, but what's more important is he is great in one-on-one situations and when he breaks through, it leads to danger and goals."

Some compare him to Chelsea and Belgium's Eden Hazard as both are diminutive dribbling machines who are quick, tricky, two-footed and experts in the art of improvisation.

In spite of all his feints, spins and changes of direction, Rafa Silva always seems to have the ball on a string and, for someone so raw, he has an incredible ability to locate space between the lines.

"If you want to enjoy yourself, just give him the ball," says national team full-back Raphael Guerreiro.

Nick Bidwell

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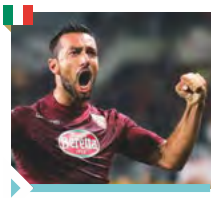


Fabio QUAGLIARELLA
Age 32, Torino & Italy

Versatile forward who is back at first club Torino and scoring regularly. Capped by Italy from under-18 level upwards.

Romel QUINONEZ
Age 22, Bolivar & Bolivia

Could grow into one of Bolivia's finest ever goalkeepers. Confident figure who seeks to command his area. Came through Bolivar's youth ranks.

Andrea RAGGI
Age 30, Monaco (Fra) & Italy

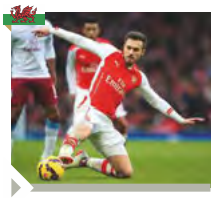
Defender who doesn't get many headlines but is a hugely influential figure at Monaco as club captain. In his third season after signing from Bologna.

Ivan RAKITIC
Age 27, Barcelona (Spa) & Croatia

Midfielder signed from Sevilla last summer and seen as a key figure in Luis Enrique's new, more direct playing style at Barca.

RAMIRES
Age 25, Chelsea (Eng) & Brazil

Combative and hard-running midfielder who helped Chelsea win the League Cup after being sidelined for much of the current campaign through injury.



Aaron RAMSEY
Age 24, Arsenal (Eng) & Wales

Extremely talented but injury-prone goalscoring midfielder. Key figure in Wales' bid to qualify for Euro 2016. A former Cardiff City youth product.

Alvaro RECOBA
Age 39, Nacional & Uruguay

One-time golden boy who hasn't lost the air of a mischievous adolescent. Can still do damage off the bench with free kicks.

Winston REID
Age 26, West Ham United (Eng) & New Zealand

Powerful Danish-raised centre-back, New Zealand captain. Chased by many top clubs but signed a new deal with West Ham.

PROFILED
SERGIO RAMOS
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Franck RIBERY

Age 31, Bayern Munich (Ger) & France

Since winning UEFA's award as the best player in Europe for the 2012-13 season, things have not gone smoothly for Franck Ribery.

Despite a campaign by the French media, he lost out to Lionel Messi in the end-of-year Ballon d'Or for the world's best player for 2013. A back injury then forced him to sit out last year's World Cup in Brazil, where France missed his cutting edge in attack. And even though he has won multiple titles with Bayern Munich in Germany, his relationship with the country of his birth has broken down irreconcilably.

In August 2014, he announced his international retirement at the age of 31 – a decision that prompted a furious reaction from Michel Platini, who threatened him with a club ban and said: "If [coach] Didier Deschamps picks him, he must come. That's the FIFA rule. If he doesn't, he'll be suspended for three Bayern Munich games."

Deschamps, more diplomatically, accepted Ribery's position and recognised that France will be without their best player when they host Euro 2016.

Ribery's fractious relations with his homeland took another turn for the worse in February when, in an interview given to *Bild*, he claimed he could take German citizenship. "Why not? I can imagine staying in Munich after the end of my career," he said.

"I have bought a very nice house, I feel good here and I like the mentality. My children are doing well at school, they have German friends.

"My son Saif was born here, he may even one day play for Germany."

Much of Ribery's disenchantment with France stems from French attitudes towards the injury that ruled him out of the World Cup. France's team doctor, Franck Le Gall, believed the injury could have been treated with cortisone were he not "afraid of needles". Bayern's doctor, Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt, responded by rejecting claims that Ribery's phobia stemmed from the overuse of injections in Munich.

"I was hurt, really hurt, by what happened before the 2014 World Cup," says Ribery. "For two years I had done everything for the World Cup. I

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was the top scorer [in qualifying], and also set up the most goals. France made it to the World Cup because of me. But that is over."

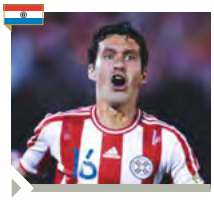
L'Equipe's Saturday magazine devoted much of one edition to "Ribery: the break". In an interview with Ribery's agent, Jean-Pierre Bernes, the magazine asked why Ribery no longer spoke with the French media. "Bayern is a family who hosted his recovery from the shoulder injury, as no one would in France," Bernes said. "That's the paradox: he is always much revered in Germany, while in France, he is unloved."

The fallout with the French has at least allowed Ribery to devote all his energies to Bayern. But it remains to be seen whether he can hit the heights of 2013 again.

John Holmesdale

Marco REUS
Age 25, Borussia Dortmund & Germany

Mercurial left-winger who missed the World Cup through injury and recently agreed to extend his contract at Dortmund.



Cristian RIVEROS
Age 32, Olimpia & Paraguay

Stalwart national-team midfielder, excellent at ghosting into the penalty box. Has just come home after spells in Mexico, England, Turkey and Brazil.

Arjen ROBBEN
Age 31, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Holland

Brilliant winger who seems to get better with age. Stronger than ever and thriving under Pep Guardiola's guidance in Munich.

ROBINHO
Age 31, Santos & Brazil

Never quite lived up to the intense hype that once surrounded him, but the skilful striker, a surprise omission from the World Cup, is still in the Brazil squad.

Sebastian RODE
Age 24, Bayern Munich & Germany

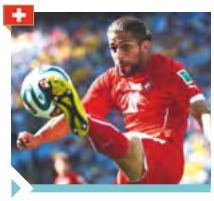
Central midfielder who has played more than was expected since his move from Eintracht Frankfurt last summer.

James RODRIGUEZ
Age 23, Real Madrid (Spa) & Colombia

Elevated to *galactico* status by his superb performances at the 2014 World Cup, but injuries have limited his impact at Real.

Maxi RODRIGUEZ
Age 34, Newell's Old Boys & Argentina

Winger who is back as captain of his first club after spells in Spain and England. Veteran of three World Cups, still playing for Argentina.

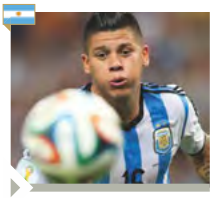


Ricardo RODRIGUEZ
Age 22, Wolfsburg (Ger) & Switzerland

Left-back who has thrived at Wolfsburg. Well established as the Swiss national team's first choice.

ROGERIO CENI
Age 42, Sao Paulo & Brazil

Goalscoring goalkeeper who has racked up over 120 goals in his career. Retires at the end of this season.



Marcos ROJO
Age 24, Manchester United (Eng) & Argentina

Left-sided defender dismissed as a panic buy last summer despite a fine World Cup.

PROFILED
ROBBIE ROGERS
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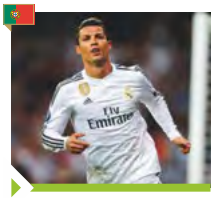
RONALDINHO
Age 34, Queretaro (Mex) & Brazil

Twice World Player of the Year and a Champions League winner, he made a surprise switch to Mexico last year.



Cristiano RONALDO
Age 30, Real Madrid (Spa) & Portugal

Reigning World Player of the Year and top dog in Madrid – as Gareth Bale has discovered to his cost this season.

Salomon RONDON
Age 25, Zenit (Rus) & Venezuela

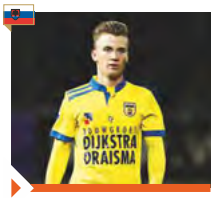
Top goalscorer in the Russian Premier League this season and the most successful Venezuelan in European club football.

Wayne ROONEY
Age 29, Manchester United & England

Captain of club and country. Deployed in midfield by Louis Van Gaal this season but always at his best as a boisterous striker.

RUBEN NEVES
Age 18, Porto & Portugal

Midfielder who is being tipped for greatness. With Porto since the age of eight and the youngest Portuguese player to appear in the Champions League.

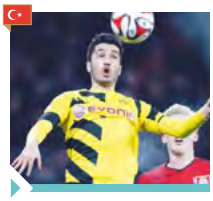


Albert RUSNAK
Age 20, Groningen (Hol) & Slovakia

Attacking midfielder who failed to break through at Manchester City. Joined Groningen in January after a loan spell at Cambuur.

Matthew RYAN
Age 22, Club Brugge (Blg) & Australia

Highly rated keeper who was a very solid performer for Australia as they won this year's Asian Cup on home soil.

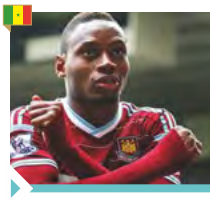


Nuri SAHIN
Age 26, Borussia Dortmund (Ger) & Turkey

Midfield playmaker who has re-established himself at Dortmund after disappointing spells with Real Madrid and Liverpool.

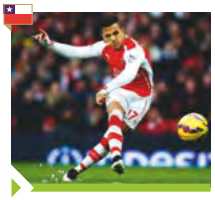
Trent SAINSBURY
Age 23, PEC Zwolle (Hol) & Australia

Central defender who was an Asian Cup winner with Australia and who also holds a UK passport. Moved to Holland last year.



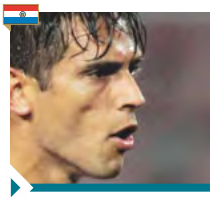
Diafra SAKHO
Age 25, West Ham (Eng) & Senegal

Regular scorer since this season, but missed the African Nations Cup through injury, prompting FIFA to fine West Ham £70,000.



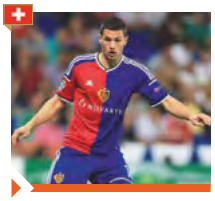
Alexis SANCHEZ
Age 26, Arsenal (Eng) & Chile

Stubborn, stocky, skilful forward who has revelled in his star status at Arsenal since his summer move from loveless Barcelona.



Roque SANTA CRUZ
Age 33, Cruz Azul (Mex) & Paraguay

Has the biggest salary in Liga MX, but has been a big disappointment so far this season.



Fabian SCHAR
Age 23, Basle & Switzerland

Central defender who has been a formidable force for the past two years. Presents a great aerial threat at set-pieces. Linked with a move abroad.

Andre SCHURRLE
Age 24 Wolfsburg & Germany

World Cup-winning forward who is back in the Bundesliga after being deemed surplus to requirements at Chelsea by manager Jose Mourinho.

Mohamed SALAH

Age 22, Fiorentina (Ita) & Egypt

After scoring one of the goals of the season as Fiorentina inflicted a first home defeat on Juventus in two years, people began to wonder whether the "Special One", Jose Mourinho, had made a mistake.

Picking up a corner-kick clearance on the edge of his area, the Chelsea loanee set off on a blistering 70-yard run which ended with a brilliantly struck finish as the *Viola* beat the Serie A leaders 2-1 in the first leg of their Italian Cup semi-final clash.

In his first seven games since moving to Florence as part of the deal that saw Juan Cuadrado move to Chelsea in January, Salah scored six goals. His current strike-rate of a goal every 72 minutes represents a dream start in Italy and much better than stars such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Diego Milito, Andriy Shevchenko and Brazilian ace Ronaldo to name but four.

Not only does Salah currently look like the sharpest striker in Serie A. In the space of less than a month his goals have put Fiorentina into the last 16 of the Europa League, back in the hunt for a Champions League place and given them a terrific opportunity to make their second consecutive Italian Cup Final appearance.

Not much wonder then that Fiorentina are now seriously thinking of holding onto the player. With the payment of €1million in June, the Italian club can extend their deal with Chelsea for another 12 months. Then, come the summer of 2016, they have the option to either pay around €16m-€18m to buy the Egyptian permanently or they can send him back to Stamford Bridge.

Salah signed for Chelsea in January 2014 after impressing for Basle against them in the 2013 Europa League campaign and last season's Champions League group stage. Indeed, he scored against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in the semi-final first leg, although the Swiss champions went on to lose the tie 5-2 on aggregate, while Chelsea went on to beat Benfica in the Final. Last season, he scored against the London side in both Champions League group games.

Salah arrived at Stamford Bridge just as Belgian winger Kevin De Bruyne and Spanish playmaker Juan Mata were leaving, for Wolfsburg and Manchester United respectively. In the meantime, the Cuadrado-Salah deal means that the Premier League club continues to pay Salah's salary, a handy post-tax €1m from January to the end of this season.

Some might say that Fiorentina got the better of this deal...

Paddy Agnew

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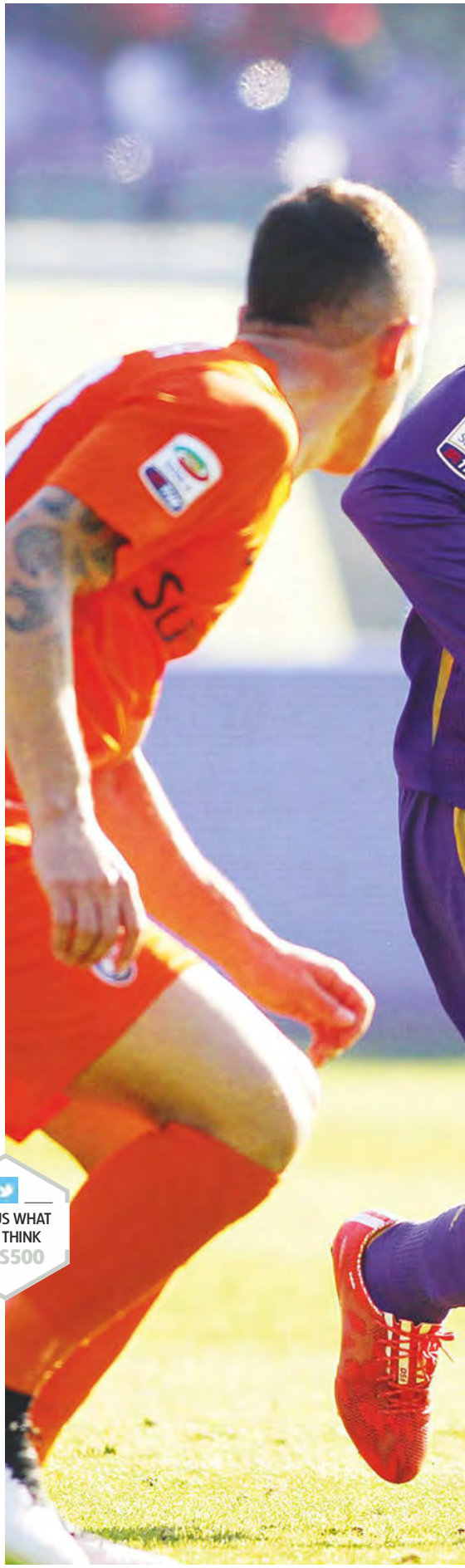
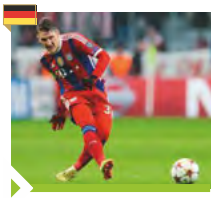




Bastian SCHWEINSTEIGER
Age 30, Bayern Munich & Germany

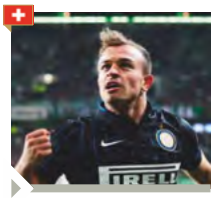
Central midfielder with more than 100 caps for Germany. Clever reader of the game, with a fierce shot.

Davie SELKE
Age 20, Werder Bremen & Germany

A talented striker who was the tournament's top goalscorer when Germany won the 2014 Euro Under-19 Championship.

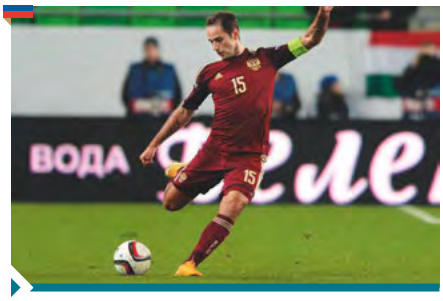
Thulani SERERO
Age 24, Ajax (Hol) & South Africa

South Africa's most high-profile player but was left out of the 2015 African Nations Cup squad after playing in the qualifiers.



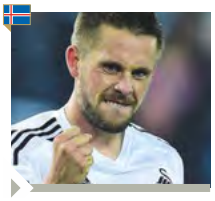
Xherdan SHAQIRI
Age 23, Internazionale (Ita) & Switzerland

Mercurial midfielder who moved to Serie A from Bayern Munich in January in an attempt to get more starting time.



Roman SHIROKOV
Age 33, Krasnodar & Russia

National captain who missed the 2014 World Cup with a knee injury. Left Zenit last year following a contract dispute.



Gylfi SIGURDSSON
Age 25, Swansea City (Eng) & Iceland

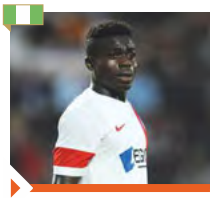
Playmaker and free-kick specialist who is enjoying life back at Swansea after a spell at Tottenham.

David SILVA
Age 29, Manchester City (Eng) & Spain

Arguably more important to City than Sergio Aguero as the brains behind the team's best attacking moves.

Gio SIMEONE
Age 19, River Plate & Argentina

Scored eight goals in the recent South American Under-20 Championship and is the son of Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone.



Moses SIMON
Age 19, Genk (Blg) & Nigeria

Speedy attacker with strong dribbling skills. Moved to Belgium in January after a spell in the Slovakian league, having previously been with Ajax.

Daley SINKGRAVEN
Age 19, Ajax & Holland

Exciting attacking midfielder who joined Ajax from Heerenveen in January for €7m. Current Dutch under-21 international.

Moussa SISSOKO
Age 25, Newcastle United (Eng) & France

Box-to-box midfielder who has been his club's best player this season – so is likely to be the next player sold by Mike Ashley.

Pione SISTO
Age 20, Midtjylland & Denmark

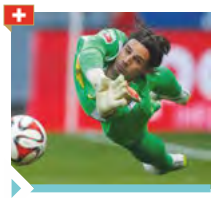
Uganda-born Danish under-21 international. A striker, he was the 2014 Danish league player of the year and is Denmark's biggest domestic talent.

Ari SKULASON
Age 27, OB (Den) & Iceland

Has been Iceland's left-back during the national side's run of good form over the past two years. Plays in midfield for his Danish club.

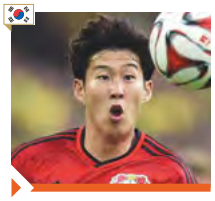
Wesley SNEIJDER
Age 30, Galatasaray (Tur) & Holland

Attacker midfielder who remains a key figure for Holland. Could move back to western Europe this summer.



Yann SOMMER
Age 26, Borussia M'gladbach (Ger) & Switzerland

National-team keeper who has impressed in his first season in the Bundesliga since moving from Swiss side Basle.



SON Heung-Min
Age 22, Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) & South Korea

Exciting attacking talent who excelled at this year's Asian Cup despite opposition from his club side who didn't want him to go.

Jonathan SORIANO
Age 29, RB Salzburg (Aut) & Spain

Former Barca B striker who has been prolific in Austria, with virtually a goal a game for the past three seasons.

Moussa SOW
Age 29, Fenerbahce (Tur) & Senegal

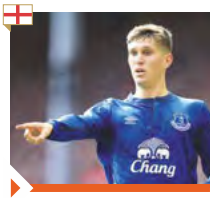
A regular scorer for Lille and Fenerbahce over many seasons. Appeared for France under-21s before switching to Senegal.

Darijo SRNA
Age 32, Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) & Croatia

Captain of club and country, and a vibrant presence on the right flank. However, his time at Shakhtar is coming to an end.

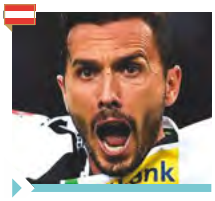
Raheem STERLING
Age 20, Liverpool & England

Can provide pace on the wing or playing through the middle. Already an important figure for both club and country.



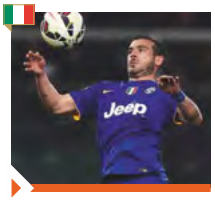
John STONES
Age 20, Everton & England

Confident, ball-playing centre-back. His form has dipped this season due to injuries, but is still the brightest young defensive prospect in the English game.



Martin STRANZL
Age 34, Borussia M'gladbach (Ger) & Austria

Veteran defender who has excelled at Monchengladbach, since returning to the Bundesliga after a spell in Russia.



Stefano STURARO
Age 22, Juventus & Italy

Under-21 midfielder who was recently recalled from a spell at Genoa following a string of strong performances while on loan.

Sergio RAMOS

Age 28, Real Madrid & Spain

It's the semi-final of Euro 2012 and a penalty shoot-out against Portugal stands between Spain and the Final. The last time Sergio Ramos took a spot-kick, against Bayern Munich in the semi-final of the Champions League, he blasted the ball miles over the bar. The pressure is on; so what does he do? Ramos runs up and dinks the ball home, Panenka style.

He later admitted that the decision had been made immediately after missing the penalty against Bayern. He had told his dad and his brother the next day: "the next penalty, a Panenka. You'll see how everyone who's talking now will shut up for a while. I'm going to dink it."

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There was something very Ramos about that decision: pride, nerve, leadership and a touch of adventure too. Ramos is the defender with an attacker's soul. There is possibly no one more dangerous from corners and set-plays: he's scored more career goals than Andres Iniesta.

But his importance at the other end of the pitch is enormous, too. He revels in the responsibility and, while he may not wear the armband, he is the de facto captain of Real Madrid. He has often talked about how he has enjoyed the few times he has been used as a central midfielder, while his time at right-back enabled him to bomb up and down the pitch. His role at full-back, however, made him feel peripheral and he much prefers to be at the heart of things.

"You're the axis of the defence," he explains. "You lead more, you organise the back four, you have more hierarchy, you bring the defence out, you position your full-backs."

Real Madrid's recent form underlined his significance. Ramos missed six games – the longest absence of his career – and Real lost three, drawing one and winning just two, as their lead at the top of La Liga vanished. "Ramos will help us recover because of his character," Carlo Ancelotti admitted.

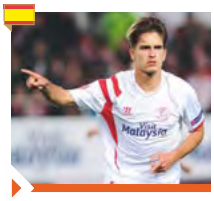
The Italian coach has come to admire Ramos. Although the defender has had a tendency for slow starts, and lapses of concentration before Christmas, when the season reaches the key months, he invariably plays at his best. Ancelotti had doubts about him at the beginning of his first season, to the point of contemplating leaving him out, but by the end considered him irreplaceable.

And then there's the goals. In the 94th minute of last year's Champions League Final, he headed in the equaliser that changed the game against Atletico Madrid and changed Real's destiny. As one member of the coaching staff puts it: "Every day when we see him, we still feel like kissing him."

Sid Lowe

Daniel STURRIDGE
Age 25, Liverpool & England

God-fearing forward who has blossomed at Liverpool after being moved on by Manchester City and Chelsea.

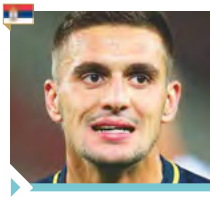


Denis SUAREZ
Age 21, Sevilla & Spain

Spanish under-21 international midfielder who was sold by Manchester City to Barcelona in 2013 and now thriving on loan at Sevilla.

Luis SUAREZ
Age 28, Barcelona (Spa) & Uruguay

The temperamental attacker has divided opinion in Barcelona since his £75m move but he has adapted well to La Liga.



Dusan TADIC
Age 26, Southampton (Eng) & Serbia

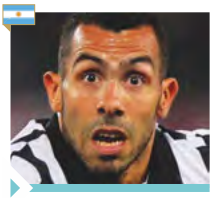
Midfielder who was Ronald Koeman's first signing and has gone on to play an important part in Southampton's fine campaign.

TALISCA
Age 21, Benfica (Por) & Brazil

Benfica coach Jorge Jesus says that the rough-diamond attacker will be "the next player to earn the Portuguese club millions".

John TERRY
Age 34, Chelsea & England

Chelsea's headline-grabbing captain may have retired from international football but he remains a crucial figure in the club's backline.



Carlos TEVEZ
Age 31, Juventus (Ita) & Argentina

In fine goalscoring form for his club in Serie A this season and recalled by Argentina ahead of the summer's Copa America.

Florian THAUVIN
Age 22, Marseille & France

One of French football great hopes, he is a hugely promising attacking midfielder who was an Under-20 World Cup winner in 2013.

Diego TARDELLI

Age 29, Shandong Luneng (Chn) & Brazil

Brazil's man of the moment is the choice of returning national coach Dunga to replace the disgraced Fred, the centre-forward who was one of the primary scapegoats for the World Cup semi-final humiliation by Germany in Belo Horizonte. But unlike his fellow members of the *Selecao*, Tardelli plays his club football in neither Brazil nor Europe but China.

Named in honour of both Diego Maradona and 1982 Italian World Cup winner Marco Tardelli, he joined Shandong Luneng in January – for a salary reported to be £3million a year – and was reunited with Shandong's Brazilian coach Cuca, who was in charge of Atletico Mineiro from 2011 to 2013.

Dunga wrongly claimed that the move came about because no European club could afford to sign Tardelli, whose past spells at Real Betis, PSV and Anzhi Makhachkala did not work out, while a move to Qatari club Al Gharafa was curtailed in 2013 when Mineiro took him back on loan.

His inclusion in Dunga's squad to face France and Chile in late March meant Tardelli became the first China-based player to be called up by Brazil. It was also an appreciation of the qualities he showed when Brazil beat Argentina 2-0 in a friendly in Beijing last October. Playing in a false-nine role, he scored both goals and impressed with his link-up play with Neymar.

It is, however, hard to escape the feeling that the March friendlies could prove to be the pacy, mobile striker's swansong with the national side. First capped in 2009, during Dunga's first spell as coach, he was on standby for the 2010 World Cup but overlooked by Luiz Felipe Scolari four years later. Only Dunga's return, and the clamour for a different style of play, saw his return.

With Tardelli unavailable for November's games against Turkey and Austria, Dunga tried a more traditional centre-forward with Luiz Adriano of Shakhtar Donetsk. And with Liverpool's Philippe Coutinho in fine form of late, Tardelli's place has come under greater scrutiny. And while Coutinho's club games are screened around the world, Dunga is unlikely to be flying out to China on a regular basis to check out Tardelli's progress in the Chinese Super League.

It remains to be seen how long Tardelli will stay in China. He arrived at Shandong just as another Brazilian striker, Wagner Love, was deemed surplus to requirements.

After those three separate spells in Europe ended in disappointment, he chose to head back to his homeland. Few would bet against him making a repeat journey.

John Holmesdale

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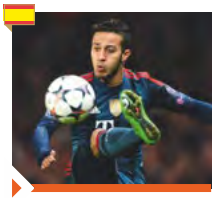


THIAGO ALCANTARA
Age 23, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Spain

Talented central midfielder who has been tormented by injuries since moving to the Bundesliga.

THIAGO SILVA
Age 30, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Brazil

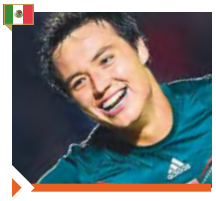
Arguably the world's best defender. Has lost the Brazilian captaincy to Neymar since Dunga returned as coach, but is still hugely important.

Ryan THOMAS
Age 20, PEC Zwolle (Hol) & New Zealand

Winger who has made a dramatic impact at Zwolle in the past, earning a senior international debut in March last year.

Youri TIELEMANS
Age 17, Anderlecht & Belgium

Exciting prospect who is already a regular in Anderlecht's midfield and is the youngest Belgian player ever to appear in the Champions League.



Erick TORRES
Age 22, Houston Dynamo (USA) & Mexico

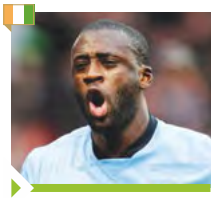
His signing by Houston from the now defunct Chivas-USA was proof of the growing pulling power of MLS for Mexican stars.

Oliver TORRES
Age 20, Porto (Por) & Spain

Perhaps the sign of things to come for Portugal's biggest clubs. A fine talent but Porto can only afford to loan him from Atletico Madrid.

Francesco TOTTI
Age 38, Roma & Italy

The grand old man of Roman football continues to roll back the years. Says he will retire "when I start making a fool of myself".



Yaya TOURE
Age 31, Manchester City (Eng) & Ivory Coast

Africa's footballer of the year for the fourth successive time, the midfielder is a colossus for both his club and country.

Robbie ROGERS

Age 27, Los Angeles Galaxy & USA

Robbie Rogers is a reluctant pioneer. In February 2013, weeks after being released by Leeds United, he became the first openly gay footballer active in a leading professional league; furthermore, he was also the only gay sportsman in any of America's major sports.

It was not a decision he took lightly. He knew there would be serious repercussions and he made his declaration via a carefully worded statement on his personal blog, followed by an announcement that he would be retiring from football to pursue a career in fashion.

Two years on and a lot has happened in Rogers' life. He moved back to the west coast of America, signed up with former team LA Galaxy, with whom he won the 2014 MLS title, and published a book called *Coming Out to Play*.

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Rogers has become an influential figure in the field of gay rights. After basketball player Jason Collins came out in April 2013, he sought Rogers for advice on dealing with the media. "I realised just by playing again on a soccer field, there's a symbol right there that can encourage and give people hope," he says.

There have been other gay players, of course. Anton Hysen came out in 2011, but he was playing in Sweden's fourth tier. Thomas Hitzlsperger played at the highest level in England, Italy and his native Germany, but he only declared his sexuality after he had retired as a player.

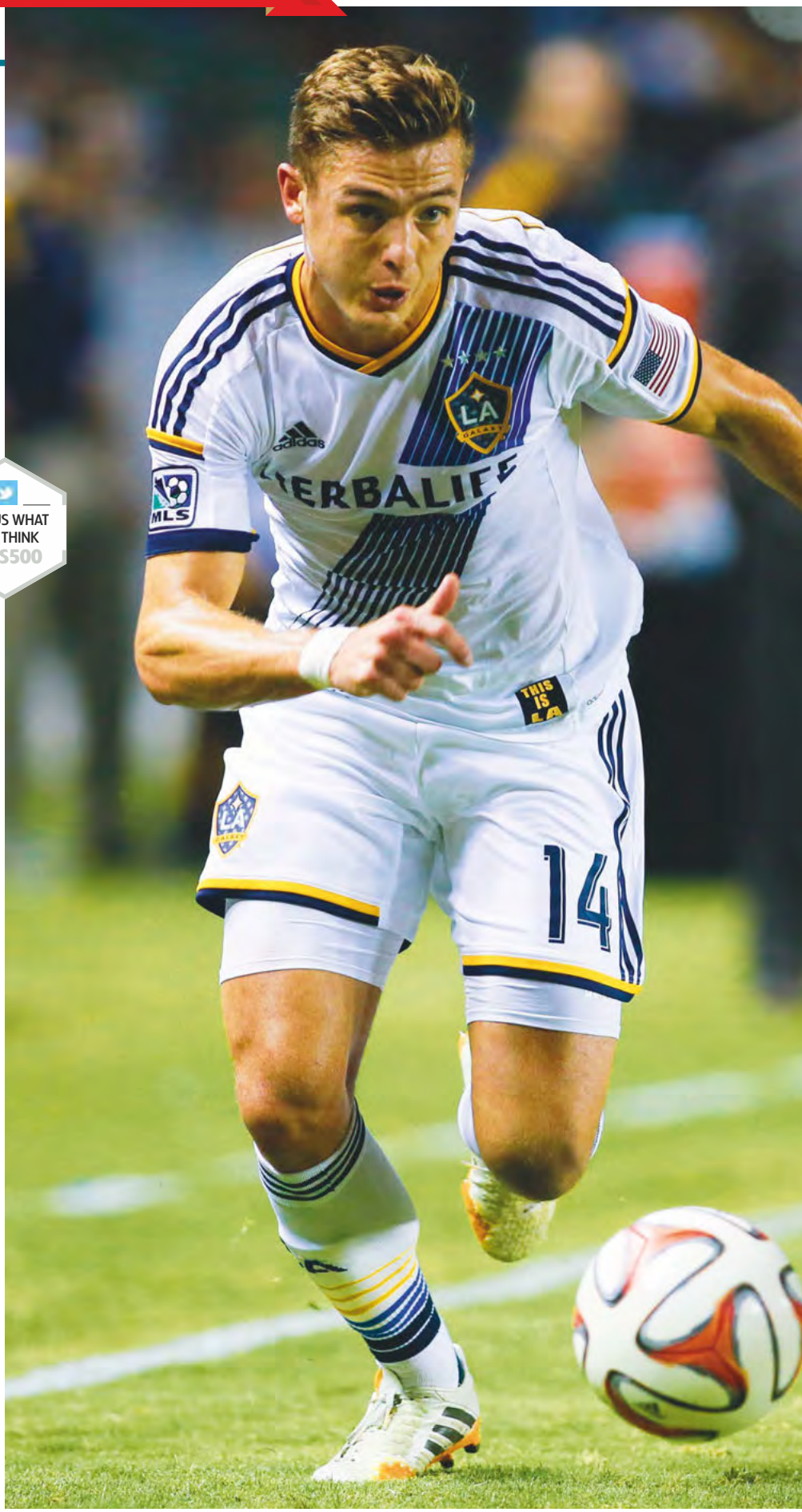
Rogers is different because, at 27, he is in the prime of his career. Last autumn, he played a key role as a full-back or wide midfielder in Galaxy's MLS triumph. "I was dancing with all the wives and girlfriends and someone said: 'Are you sure you're gay?' And I was like, Yeah, that's why I'm the only one dancing. It's just me and the girls," he joked.

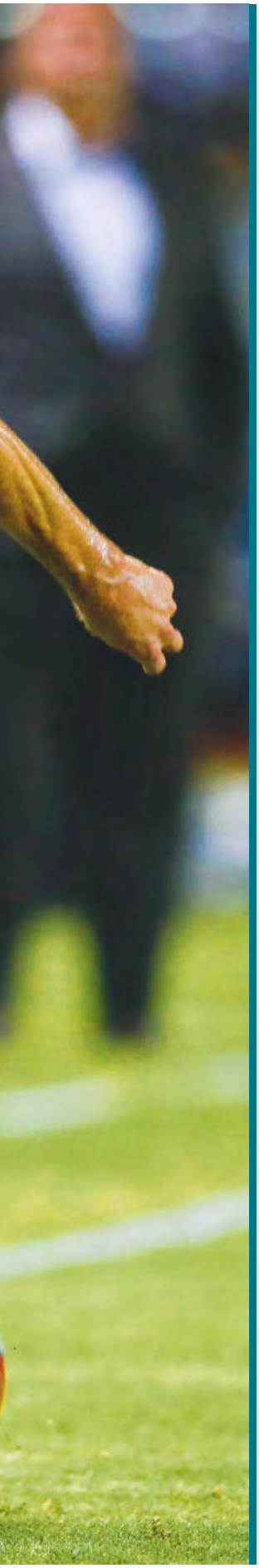
But there is also a serious side to Rogers. "Sometimes I get mad that I didn't get to experience stuff until I was 25," he says. "But then I thank God that I did it at 25 because I hear from guys who are 50 and 60 who tell me that I really respect you but I don't think I can ever come out."

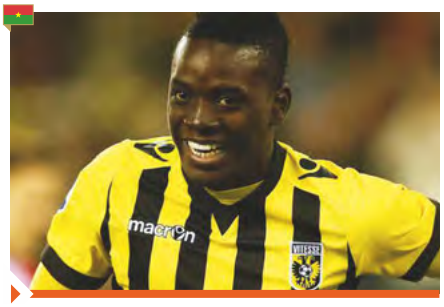
Rogers played 18 times for the US national side before his move to Leeds, where his playing career stalled. Current national coach Jurgen Klinsmann hinted recently that Rogers is not far from an international recall. But there is history between the pair. "When I was coming out, I came out to a very small group of people: my family and then some of my [former] team-mates," Rogers said. "Jurgen was one of the guys I tried to get in contact with – email, messages, stuff like that – and I haven't heard from him.

"I've known him since I was 12, 13 years old. So I think him and I need to have that conversation – a life conversation, if he's interested. I think that's more important to me than playing with the national team."

John Holmesdale







Bertrand TRAORE
Age 19, Vitesse (Hol) & Burkina Faso

One of Chelsea's many loaned-out talents, the striker has been in terrific form in the Eredivisie this season.

Alex TZIOLIS
Age 30, PAOK & Greece

Much-travelled defensive midfielder who has played in Germany, Italy, Spain and France, and remains a mainstay of his national side.

Atsuto UCHIDA
Age 27, Schalke (Ger) & Japan

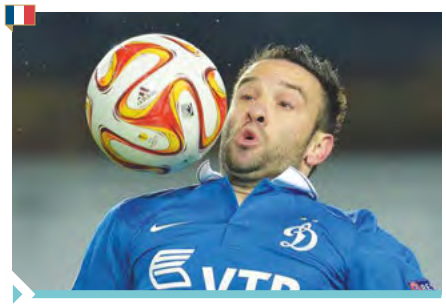
Dynamic right-back who missed the 2015 Asian Cup through injury but has been a key figure for Japan since his debut as a teenager in 2008.

Samuel UMTITI
Age 21, Lyon & France

Cameroon-born centre-half who has been Lyon's most impressive defender this season. An under-20 world champion with France.

Jonathan URRETEVISCAYA
Age 25, Penarol & Uruguay

Strong and skilful winger who should have achieved more in his career. Now back home after six years in Portugal.



Mathieu VALBUENA
Age 30, Dynamo Moscow (Rus) & France

Dynamic, diminutive striker who is used mostly on the right side of attack. Left Marseille last summer for the Russian league.

Jaime VALDES
Age 34, Colo Colo & Chile

Returned home last year after over a decade in Europe. Plays a deep midfield role, from where his range of passing makes a big impression.

Jorge VALDIVIA
Age 31, Palmeiras (Bra) & Chile

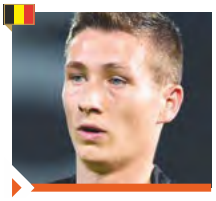
Talented playmaker who is a joy to watch on his day. However, his frequent absence through injury make some question his cost-to-benefit ratio.

Enner VALENCIA
Age 25, West Ham United (Eng) & Ecuador

Quick striker, previously a winger, who has risen rapidly over the past two years. Signed on the back of his World Cup displays.

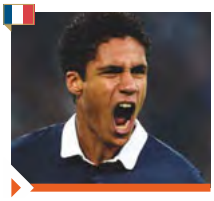
Robin VAN PERSIE
Age 31, Manchester United (Eng) & Holland

Captain of Holland and still a key figure for United despite injuries that have curtailed his influence this season.



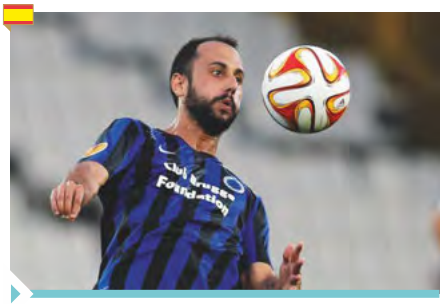
Hans VANAKEN
Age 22, Lokeren & Belgium

Highly rated attacking midfielder, the former PSV trainee has thrived at Lokeren over the past two seasons. Capped at under-20 and under-21 level.



Raphael VARANE
Age 21, Real Madrid (Spa) & France

Centre-back signed by Real Madrid while still a teenager. However, not first-choice in Madrid and reportedly coveted by Chelsea.

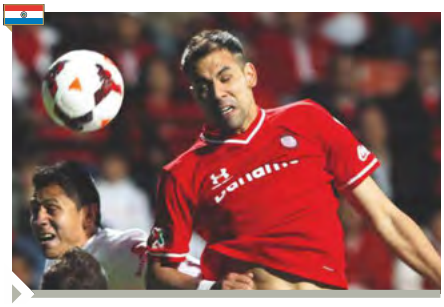


Victor VAZQUEZ
Age 28, Club Brugge (Blg) & Spain

Former team-mate of Lionel Messi at Barcelona's academy, his career has been injury-hit but he has carved out a role as a playmaker in Belgium.

Carlos VELA
Age 26, Real Sociedad (Spa) & Mexico

Mexico's leading player, he returned to the national side last autumn after a controversial two-year absence.



Pablo VELAZQUEZ
Age 28, Atletico Nacional (Col) & Paraguay

Lanky left-footed striker recently signed after a successful spell in Mexico. Could succeed Roque Santa Cruz as the leader of the Paraguay attack.

Jetro WILLEMS

Age 20, PSV & Holland

While it would be too much to describe Jetro Willems as a split personality, there is an element of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde about him. There are definitely two different versions of the PSV left-back on the pitch. One is the excellent attacker and superb crosser; the other is the far less impressive defender.

Ever since he emerged on the scene in January 2011 as a 16-year-old at second-division Sparta Rotterdam, debate has raged. Is he the real deal or are his defensive lapses blocking a career at a top European team?

Critics are the first to say that his streetwise nonchalance gets him into too much trouble, with "naive" being the word most pundits use.

However, when it comes to his attacking skills there is a highly different opinion. This season he has been on fire, providing the ammunition for striker Luuk de Jong – 11 assists and counting, making him the league's leading provider – with seemingly more to come.

Willems uses a similar technique to David Beckham. Without needing to reach the byline, he bends the ball with the right speed and accuracy around the defender. And his crosses have been crucial in PSV's hunt for their first national title in seven years.

The criticism, however, matters little to a player who is known for being stoic and not paying notice to the outside world's opinion.

Born in Rotterdam, the son of parents of the Caribbean island of Curacao, he started at amateur club Spartaan'20 before, aged seven, joining Sparta's highly praised academy. Ten years later he joined PSV, where he broke several records. He was the youngest Dutchman to play in the Europa League (November, 2011 against Hapoel Tel Aviv), while he also became the youngest player to appear in a European Championship

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(in 2012), surpassing the record of Belgian midfielder Enzo Scifo.

And although that wasn't Holland's best tournament appearance – they were eliminated in the group phase – Willems' future looked bright. But in the following seasons, those doubts about his defensive qualities appeared. And to make things worse he missed last year's World Cup because of injury.

Now it looks like he has turned the page and seems unstoppable down the left flank. Considering Holland even used striker Dirk Kuyt to fill the left-back position in Brazil, Willems' best years for club and country are still to come.

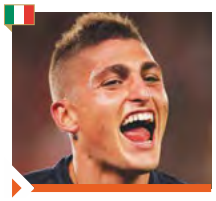
Klaas-Jan Droppert

Paul VERHAEGH
Age 31, Augsburg (Ger) & Holland

Right-back who has earned late international recognition as captain of Augsburg in their rise up the Bundesliga.

Kenneth VERMEER
Age 29, Feyenoord & Holland

Goalkeeper who has impressed since leaving Ajax last summer in search of first-team football with their great rivals.



Marco VERRATTI
Age 22, Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & Italy

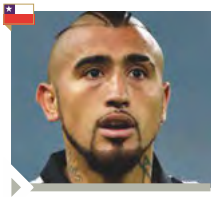
Midfielder who has been a huge success at PSG since moving to Ligue 1 from Pescara for €12m as a teenager.

Jan VERTONGHEN
Age 27, Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) & Belgium

Plays centre-half for his country and left-back for his club. Has won over a sceptical Mauricio Pocchetino this season.

Lasse VIBE
Age 28, IFK (Swe) & Denmark

Attacker who has been prolific in the Swedish league for the past two years. A late developer, he made his senior Denmark debut last autumn.



Arturo VIDAL
Age 27, Juventus (Ita) & Chile

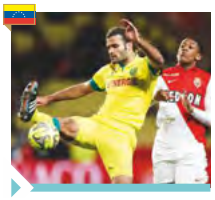
Midfield powerhouse whose form has dipped this season following injuries and the collapse of a planned transfer to Manchester United last summer.

Luciano VIETTO
Age 21, Villarreal (Spa) & Argentina

Striker who is in sparkling form since moving to La Liga last summer. Close to a senior call-up for Argentina.

David VILLA
Age 33, New York City (USA) & Spain

Prolific striker in La Liga and for Spain. Now the major MLS draw in New York with the delayed arrival of Frank Lampard.

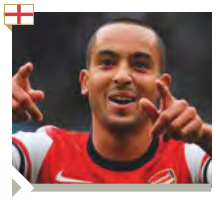


Osvaldo VIZCARRONDO
Age 30, Nantes (Fra) & Venezuela

Defender who has been ever-present for Nantes during the club's resurgence this season.

Kevin VOLLAND
Age 22, Hoffenheim & Germany

Versatile striker who made Germany's preliminary 30-man squad for the 2014 World Cup. Has been watched several times this term by Liverpool.



Theo WALCOTT
Age 26, Arsenal & England

Speedy wide attacker who missed most of last year with a knee injury. Arsenal are steeling themselves for negotiations on a new contract.

WANDERSON
Age 29, Krasnodar (Rus) & Brazil

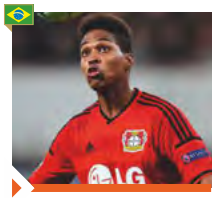
Attacker whose career has flourished in Russia over the past two years following a career that was spent mostly in Sweden and Saudi Arabia.

Victor WANYAMA
Age 23, Southampton (Eng) & Kenya

Combative midfielder who has been a key figure in Southampton's rise this season. Captain of Kenya's national team.

Danny WELBECK
Age 24, Arsenal & England

The former Manchester United trainee made a surprise switch to Arsenal last summer and has enjoyed playing a more central attacking role.



WENDELL
Age 21, Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) & Brazil

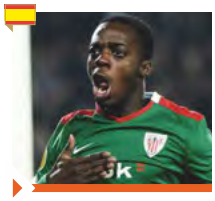
Left-back who is following in the footsteps of fellow Brazilians Ze Roberto and Lucio at Leverkusen.

Tobias WERNER
Age 29, Augsburg & Germany

Midfielder who has risen through the ranks of the Bundesliga with Augsburg since joining in 2008 and is now the club's top goalscorer.

Georginio WIJNALDUM
Age 24, PSV & Holland

Midfielder, PSV captain and a late inclusion in Holland's 2014 World Cup squad. Rejected an offer from PSG and extended his contract.



Inaki WILLIAMS
Age 20, Athletic Bilbao & Spain

One of the sensations of La Liga this season and the first black player to score for Bilbao. Born in the city to a Ghanaian father and a Liberian mother.

WILLIAN
Age 26, Chelsea (Eng) & Brazil

Right-sided attacker favoured by Jose Mourinho for his defensive capabilities, but his place has been threatened by the arrival of Juan Cuadrado.

Jack WILSHERE
Age 23, Arsenal & England

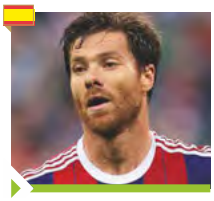
Recent injury lay-offs have shifted attention to his off-pitch habits, but when fit he remains central to manager Roy Hodgson's plans for the England team.

Axel WITSEL
Age 26, Zenit (Rus) & Belgium

Tall and talented central midfielder who protects the backline with pace and precision. A crucial figure for the Belgian national side.

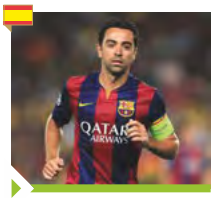
Bradley WRIGHT-PHILLIPS
Age 30, New York Red Bulls (USA) & England

Son of Ian, brother of Shaun, he scored 31 goals last season alongside the now retired Thierry Henry.



XABI ALONSO
Age 33, Bayern Munich (Ger) & Spain

Deep-lying central midfielder with a fine range of passing. Made a surprise switch to Bayern from Real Madrid last summer.



XAVI
Age 35, Barcelona & Spain

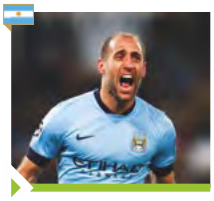
Midfield metronome who has come to embody Barcelona's *tiki taka* philosophy. Has announced his retirement from international football.

Granit XHAKA
Age 22, Borussia M'gladbach (Ger) & Switzerland

Intelligent midfielder, nicknamed "little Einstein". Swiss-born to Albanian parents, he backs Kosovo's move for world recognition.

Andriy YARMOLENKO
Age 25, Dynamo Kiev & Ukraine

Left-sided attacker dubbed the new Shevchenko. Scored Ukraine's fastest-ever goal after 14 seconds against Uruguay in 2011.



Pablo ZABALETA
Age 30, Manchester City (Eng) & Argentina

World Cup Finalist and raiding full-back, he's seen off competition from Bacary Sagna to remain City's first choice.

Simone ZAZA
Age 23, Sassuolo & Italy

Striker whose goals for unfashionable Sassuolo have earned him senior Italy call-ups. He opened his account against Norway in a Euro 2016 qualifier.

ZHENG Zhi
Age 34, Guangzhou Evergrande & China

Former Charlton and Celtic midfielder who has been a central figure in Guangzhou's recent success. National team captain.

Ron-Robert ZIELER
Age 26, Hanover & Germany

One of the Bundesliga's leading goalkeepers. Former Manchester United trainee who once played on loan for Northampton Town.

Hakim ZIYECH
Age 22, Twente & Holland

Highly rated attacking midfielder of Moroccan descent. Joined Twente last summer from Heerenveen but is coveted by other clubs. Under-21 international.

Kurt ZOUMA
Age 20, Chelsea (Eng) & France

Powerful France under-21 centre-back who displays great technique. Has been used by Chelsea in recent games as a midfield enforcer.

ZHANG Xizhe

Age 24, Wolfsburg (Ger) & China

Whereas Mr Shing Mingde has been China's ambassador to Germany for almost three years, recently signed Wolfsburg attacking midfielder Zhang Xizhe is just settling into his new role as the Bundesliga emissary of the People's Republic.

On hearing the announcement in January that the Bundesliga club had acquired the services of the ex-Beijing Guoan star, the reaction of many in the German media was to see the deal as just a PR/marketing exercise, a device for the club and its owners at VW to take advantage of the goodies in the huge Chinese marketplace.

But while the transfer clearly has its commercial components, it's not merely a case of following the money. As Wolfsburg CEO Klaus Allofs pointed out, Zhang is "one of the best players in China" and since starting his senior career back in 2009 he has enjoyed considerable success. He was voted the country's best youngster in 2012, was twice included in the top-flight Team of the Year (in 2013 and 2014) and has won 10 full international caps, scoring two goals.

Effervescent, skilful and adept at making late runs into the box, the player from the city of Wuhan in the eastern Hubei province is only the 11th Chinese player to join a professional club in Germany. And according to one of those Sino-German trailblazers Jiayi Shao – who for nine years, from 2003 to 2012, featured in midfield for 1860 Munich, Energie Cottbus and MSV Duisburg – Zhang fully deserves his shot at the European big-time.

"I know Xizhe very well from playing alongside him for Beijing and can vouch for his many qualities," says Shao. "He is quick, has two good feet, can shoot and creates chances for others. He can be a threat in a lot of different attacking positions. He likes to get forward in the middle of the field, but I think he's better out on the left.

"I would compare him to Shinji Kagawa at Dortmund. They are similar. Xizhe is small, he buzzes around and doesn't simply confine himself to getting at the opposition. He's a team player and works hard off the ball too."

One could argue that Zhang has arrived in Wolfsburg at precisely the wrong time. With the club performing so well of late and their starting line-up established, their Chinese newcomer has had to make do thus far on a friendly-only diet. However, do not write him off just yet, advises Shao. "Although the Bundesliga is a big step-up from the Chinese league, I do believe in him and his chances of making the Wolfsburg first team," he says.

"He's intelligent, has a strong will and just needs time to find himself in this new environment. The key, in my opinion, is for him to quickly be able to communicate in German."

Nick Bidwell

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Daley BLIND ... Manchester United/Holland
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DANNY ... Zenit/Portugal
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Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA Cruzeiro/Uruguay
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Daniele DE ROSSI ... Roma/Italy
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Clint DEMPSEY ... Seattle Sounders/USA
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Cesc FABREGAS ... Chelsea/Spain
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Nico GAITAN ... Benfica/Argentina
Paulo Henrique GANSO ... Sao Paulo/Brazil
P52 Sergio GARCIA ... Espanyol/Spain
Shkelzen GASHI ... Basle/Albania
Ryan GAULD P58 ... Sp Lisbon/Scotland

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Johannes GEIS ... Mainz/Germany
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JUANFRAN ... Atletico Madrid/Spain
JULIO CESAR ... Benfica/Brazil
Zlatko JUNUZOVIC ... Werder Bremen/Austria
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Robbie KEANE ... LA Galaxy/Rep Ireland
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Kalidou KOULIBALY ..... Napoli/France
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Philipp LAHM ..... Bayern Munich /Germany
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Aymeric LAPORTE ..... Athletic Bilbao/France
Ezequiel LAVEZZI ..... Paris S-G/Argentina
Leandro DAMIAO ..... Cruzeiro/Brazil
LEE Seung-woo P64 ..... Barcelona/South Korea
Robert LEWANDOWSKI ..... Bayern M/Poland
Adem LJAJIC ..... Roma/Serbia
Hugo LLORIS ..... Tottenham H/France
P66 **Nicolas LODEIRO** ..... Boca Juniors/Uruguay
Hirving LOZANO ..... Pachuca/Mexico
LUCAS MOURA ..... Paris Saint-Germain/Brazil
Franklin LUCENA .... Dep La Guiara/Venezuela
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MARQUINHOS ..... Paris St-Germain/Brazil
Anthony MARTIAL ..... Monaco/France
P68 **Jackson MARTINEZ** ..... Porto/Colombia
Obafemi MARTINS ... Seattle Sounders/Nigeria
Javier MASCHERANO ..... Barcelona/Argentina
Arthur MASUAKU ..... Olympiakos/France
Juan MATA ..... Manchester United/Spain
Nemanja MATIC ..... Chelsea/Serbia
Joel MATIP ..... Schalke/Cameroon
Blaise MATUIDI ... Paris Saint-Germain/France
Chancel MBEMBA ..... Anderlecht/Congo
Alexander MEIER ..... E Frankfurt/Germany
Edison MENDEZ ..... El Nacional/Ecuador
Jeremy MENEZ ..... Milan/France
Bernard MENSAH ..... Vit Guimaraes/Ghana
Dries MERTENS ..... Napoli/Belgium
Lionel MESSI ..... Barcelona/Argentina
Thomas MEUNIER ..... Club Brugge/Belgium
P70 **Max MEYER** ..... Schalke/Germany
Sebastian MILA ..... Lechia Gdansk/Poland
Arek MILIK ..... Ajax/Poland
Diego MILITO ..... Racing/Argentina
Alex MILOSEVIC ..... Besiktas/Sweden
Kevin MIRALLAS ..... Everton/Belgium
MIRANDA ..... Atletico Madrid/Brazil
Aleksandar MITROVIC ..... Anderlecht/Serbia
Luka MODRIC ..... Real Madrid/Croatia
Jefferson MONTERO ... Swansea City/Ecuador
Luis MONTES ..... Leon/Mexico
Alvaro MORATA ..... Juventus/Spain
Hector MORENO ..... Espanyol/Mexico
Thiago MOTTA ..... Paris Saint-Germain/Italy
Thomas MULLER ..... Bayern Munich/Germany
Luis MURIEL ..... Sampdoria/Colombia
P72 **Ahmed MUSA** ..... CSKA Moscow/Nigeria
Fernando MUSLERA ..... Galatasaray/Uruguay
Yoshinori MUTO ..... Tokyo/Japan
Radja NAINGGOLAN ..... Roma/Belgium
NALDO ..... Wolfsburg/Brazil
NANI ..... Sporting Lisbon/Portugal
Samir NASRI ..... Manchester City/France
Jesus NAVAS ..... Manchester City/Spain

Firmin NDOMBE MUBELE ..... Vita/DR Congo
Manuel NEUER ..... Bayern Munich/Germany
NEYMAR ..... Barcelona/Brazil
Saul NIGUEZ ..... Atletico Madrid/Spain
Clinton NJIE ..... Lyon/Cameroon
Nicolas NKOULOU ..... Marseille/Cameroon
Christian NOBOA ..... PAOK/Greece
NOLITO ..... Celta Vigo/Spain
Paul-Georges NTEP ..... Rennes/France
P74 **Orjan NYLAND** ..... Molde/Norway
Lucas OCAMPOS ..... Marseille/Argentina
Martin ODEGAARD ..... Real Madrid/Norway
Shinji OKAZAKI ..... Mainz/Japan
Rubin OKOTIE ..... 1860 Munich/Austria
Ogenyi ONAZI ..... Lazio/Nigeria
OSCAR ..... Chelsea/Brazil
Dani OSVALDO ..... Boca Juniors/Italy
Nicolas OTAMENDI ..... Valencia/Argentina
Romulo OTERO ..... Caracas/Venezuela
Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN .....
..... Arsenal/England
Mesut OZIL ..... Arsenal/Germany
Leandro PAREDES ..... Roma/Argentina
Dani PAREJO ..... Valencia/Spain
Javier PASTORE .... Paris St-Germain/Argentina
Alexandre PATO ..... Sao Paulo/Brazil
P76 PAULO ANDRE ..... Cruzeiro/Brazil
Dmitri PAYET ..... Marseille/France
PEDRO ..... Barcelona/Spain
Graziano PELLE ..... Southampton/Italy
PEPE ..... Real Madrid/Portugal
Oribe PERALTA ..... America/Mexico
Gaston PEREIRO ..... Nacional/Uruguay
Roberto PEREYRA ..... Juventus/Argentina
Enzo PEREZ ..... Valencia/Argentina
Omar PEREZ ..... Santa Fe/Argentina
Pablo PIATTI ..... Valencia/Argentina
Gerard PIQUE ..... Barcelona/Spain
Andrea PIRLO ..... Juventus/Italy
Miralem PJANIC ..... Roma/Bosnia
Paul POGBA ..... Juventus/France
Dennis PRAET P74 ..... Anderlecht/Belgium
Lucas PRATTO ..... Atletico Mineiro/Argentina
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RAFA SILVA ..... Braga/Portugal
Andrea RAGGI ..... Monaco/Italy
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RAMIRES ..... Chelsea/Brazil
Sergio RAMOS P84 ..... Real Madrid/Spain
Aaron RAMSEY ..... Arsenal/Wales
Alvaro RECOBA ..... Nacional/Uruguay
Winston REID .... West Ham Utd/New Zealand
Marco REUS ..... Borussia Dortmund/Germany
Franck RIBERY ..... Bayern Munich/France
Cristian RIVEROS ..... Olimpia/Paraguay
Arjen ROBBEN ..... Bayern Munich/Holland
ROBINHO ..... Santos/Brazil
Sebastian RODE ..... Bayern Munich/Germany
James RODRIGUEZ ..... Real Madrid/Colombia
Maxi RODRIGUEZ ..... Newell's OB/Argentina
P80 **Ricardo RODRIGUEZ** .. Wolfsburg/Switzerland
ROGERIO CENI ..... Sao Paulo/Brazil
Robbie ROGERS P88 ..... LA Galaxy/USA
Marcos ROJO ... Manchester United/Argentina
RONALDINHO ..... Queretaro/Brazil
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Wayne ROONEY ..... Manchester Utd/England
RUBEN NEVES ..... Porto/Portugal
Albert RUSNAK ..... Groningen/Slovakia
Matthew RYAN ..... Club Brugge/Australia
Nuri SAHIN ..... Borussia Dortmund/Turkey
Trent SAINSBURY ..... PEC Zwolle/Australia
Diafra SAKHO ..... West Ham United/Senegal
Mohamed SALAH ..... Fiorentina/Egypt
Alexis SANCHEZ ..... Arsenal/Chile
Roque SANTA CRUZ ..... Cruz Azul/Paraguay
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Davie SELKE ..... Werder Bremen/Germany
Thulani SERERO ..... Ajax/South Africa
Xherdan SHAQIRI ..... Inter/Switzerland
Roman SHIROKOV ..... Krasnodar/Russia

Gylfi SIGURDSSON ..... Swansea City/Iceland
David SILVA ..... Manchester City/Spain
Gio SIMEONE ..... River Plate/Argentina
Moses SIMON ..... Genk/Nigeria
Daley SINKGRAVEN ..... Ajax/Holland
Moussa SISSOKO ..... Newcastle United/France
Pione SISTO ..... Midtjylland/Denmark
Ari SKULASON ..... OB/Iceland
Wesley SNEIJDER ..... Galatasaray/Holland
P84 **Yann SOMMER** ..... B M'gladbach/Switzerland
SON Heung-min ..... Bay Leverkusen/S Korea
Jonathan SORIANO ..... RB Salzburg/Spain
Moussa SOW ..... Fenerbahce/Senegal
Darijo SRNA ..... Shakhtar Donetsk/Croatia
Raheem STERLING ..... Liverpool/England
John STONES ..... Everton/England
Martin STRANZL ..... B M'gladbach/Germany
Stefano STURARO ..... Genoa/Italy
Daniel STURRIDGE ..... Liverpool/England
Denis SUAREZ ..... Sevilla/Spain
Luis SUAREZ ..... Barcelona/Uruguay
Dusan TADIC ..... Southampton/Serbia
TALISCA ..... Benfica/Brazil
Diego TARDELLI ..... Shandong Luneng/Brazil
John TERRY ..... Chelsea/England
Carlos TEVEZ ..... Juventus/Argentina
P86 **Florian THAUVIN** ..... Marseille/France
THIAGO ALCANTARA ... Bayern Munich/Spain
THIAGO SILVA ..... Paris Saint-Germain/Brazil
Ryan THOMAS ..... PEC Zwolle/New Zealand
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..... New York Red Bulls/England
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P92 **XAVI** ..... Barcelona/Spain
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ZHENG Zhi ..... Guangzhou Evergrande/China
Ron-Robert ZIELER ..... Hanover/Germany
Hakim ZIYECH ..... Twente/Holland
Kurt ZOUMA ..... Chelsea/France

Reds follow Bayern blueprint

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers has taken a leaf out of Pep Guardiola's book, says Jonathan Wilson

Regrouping...Rodgers has altered Liverpool's shape and turned them into the Premier League's form side

Liverpool's season was transformed on December 14 when they lost 3-0 to Manchester United. In the 15 league games before that one, they had picked up 21 points and scored 19 goals; in the 12 games after, they won 30 points and scored 23 goals. For once, the reason for the change was obvious: Brendan Rodgers started deploying a 3-4-2-1 formation.

Up to the United game, Liverpool had been sluggish and error-prone at the back. They badly missed Luis Suarez, who had been sold to Barcelona in the summer, and Daniel Sturridge, who was injured. Questions were asked about Rodgers. But while there are still those who find something unctuous about his manner and his habit of speaking as though quoting self-help manuals, the change he enacted over cannot be doubted.

The first game using the new shape may have ended in defeat, but the performance was much improved and, had it not been for an inspired performance from United goalkeeper David De Gea, it may well have ended very differently. Since then, Liverpool have been the form team in the Premier League, playing slick, crisp, confident football, reinvigorating their challenge for Champions League qualification while pushing Chelsea to the limit in the semi-finals of the League Cup and reaching the semi-finals of the FA Cup. Only a penalty shoot-out defeat to Besiktas in the Europa League counts as a disappointment.

Put simply, the shape asks opponents questions they are not used to answering. Most teams operate with either one or two holding central midfielders. As soon as they face two central creators, particularly mobile ones who are adept at pulling wide and exploiting any space that appears behind the full-backs, that creates issues.

Even if there are two holders in opposition, these can be dragged apart, exposing the central defenders to either

> "If we lose the ball, we've all the right players located close to each other high up in the centre of the pitch... it'll be easy to win the ball back"
>
> Pep Guardiola on playing 3-4-2-1

Impressive... Mandzukic (centre) scores in Bayern's 3-0 victory over CSKA

runners from deep or a centre-forward who drops off and can then turn and run at them. Raheem Sterling has excelled in that role, as has Sturridge since his return. The most obvious beneficiary, however, has been Philippe Coutinho, who is revelling in the space his new role allows him. Further back, the use of three central defenders screened by a holding player – Lucas Leiva has enjoyed a new lease of life – has eased some of the defensive worries.

The formation is unusual, but it isn't unique. In September 2013, Bayern Munich beat Hanover 2-0. Pep Guardiola had been coach for a month-and-a-half and had lost only one game, the German Super Cup – a performance the club's sporting director, Matthias Sammer, had described as "lethargic". Guardiola spent the day after the game watching the video over and over, analysing, thinking.

As Marti Perarnau describes in his book *Pep Confidential*, after six hours he had a revelation: "We keep [Philipp] Lahm in the midfield. That's not up for discussion. On either side of him, backing him up, [Jerome] Boateng and Dante, so that Lahm can make aggressive runs to break up the opposition. Bastian [Schweinsteiger] and [Toni] Kroos as attacking midfielders and then we delineate the movements.

"Rafinha and [David] Alaba are no longer full-backs at that point, they join the midfield. They occupy space slightly infield, although they can move to help [Arjen] Robben and [Franck] Ribery on the touchlines if it's the right thing to do. When we are in possession, we play vertically, building from the superiority in midfield which the addition of Rafinha and Alaba has given us. If we lose the ball then we've all the right players located close to each other high up in the centre of the pitch: it'll be easy to win the ball back."

The shape was a 3-4-2-1, with Lahm operating as a defensive midfielder-cum-central defender, and Robben and Ribery given licence to roam the width of the pitch behind Mario Mandzukic, the understanding being that if they went inside, the full-backs would take up their position on the flank.

CSKA Moscow were the first team to face Bayern in this shape and were beaten 3-0. The sterile possession that had characterised Bayern's performance against Hanover was gone and something far more purposeful had taken its place. The following weekend, Bayern went out and hammered Schalke 4-0.

Boost...Coutinho has benefitted greatly

As Thomas Muller came to replace Mandzukic at centre-forward, there were games that season in which Bayern effectively played with three defenders, one of them stepping into midfield, and seven midfielders. This offered an astonishing fluidity, something that worked only because Bayern were so adept in possession and so good at pressing, something related to Guardiola's habitual focus less on the basic lines of defence, midfield and attack than on overmanning constantly in key zones.

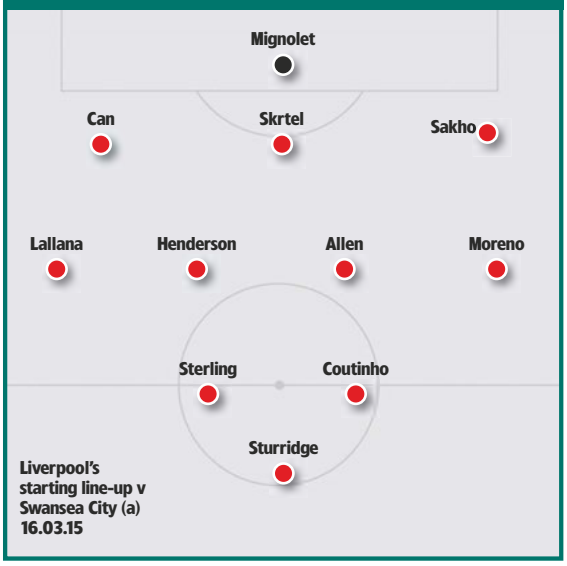
This being Guardiola, the system continued to evolve and, for the vital home leg of the Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid, he switched back to a 4-2-3-1. It was, he later admitted, the greatest mistake he had ever made as a coach. This season, Guardiola has continued his tinkering but the 3-4-2-1 has been one of his variations.

Its great advantage, for a team that plays like Bayern, is that – if required – it retains eight outfielders in the centre of the pitch, something that makes pressing and the recovering of possession easier, and also increases the number of passing options when Bayern are in possession. With the wing-backs and the two advanced midfielders having the flexibility to pull wide, though, it should mean that there is always the possibility of width.

Bayern, though, are a special case, a team whose fluidity defies crude numerical definitions, making the whole notion of formations seem a little simplistic, and it is Liverpool who are showing the possibilities 3-4-2-1 offers for less avant garde sides.

Perhaps opponents will in time come upon a way of countering it, but for now Liverpool are playing with a similar freedom and sense of excitement that carried them so close to the title last season. And for that Rodgers' tactical switch must take credit. **WS**

LIVERPOOL'S NEW SET-UP UNDER RODGERS



Liverpool's starting line-up v Swansea City (a) 16.03.15

Facetoface

ANDER GARITANO

"I want my team to show solidarity, to be brave, not scared of anyone"

The 46-year-old coach has guided Eibar through the divisions to the top flight of Spanish football

After two successive promotions, Eibar are now in the top flight for the first time in their history. With the smallest budget in the division, a stadium that holds only 5,000 in a town of just 27,000 and very few players with La Liga experience, this season must seem like a dream...
I think it's logical, in so far as it is what we have worked towards. But I also think that we're still not fully conscious of what we have achieved. One day, maybe we'll be sitting on a beach on holiday and we'll look back on it and it will hit us.

As a player with the club you only missed out on promotion to the Primera Division on the final day of the 2004-05 campaign. Do you think that makes you more aware than most of what this season means and how great an achievement it is?
I still have a thorn in my side, wedged deep in my side. It still hurts. It was virtually done. On the final day we were a first division team for about half an hour. But it didn't happen in the end. At the time I think I remember that we even went out and celebrated the season because it was an enormous success, historic, our best-ever finish. But as the months went by I realised that we had lost out on a unique opportunity that would never come back and it hurt. I never really managed to pull that thorn from my side.

> "We're used to playing against teams that are better than us, having to fight to reach their level"

Do you enjoying coaching as much as you did playing?
It's different. There's more responsibility. I came straight into coaching, no break, and you miss playing, of course, but at that time I wouldn't have wanted to play any more. I was tired of it; I didn't have the desire any more.

Why was that?
Life passes you by and you see that you only have football; 24 hours a day with football, nothing else. And years go by. Pressure? Not really. I come from a footballing family: my father, various uncles, my mother's uncle. I had always lived within that world and the pressure comes built in, even from a young age. I haven't stopped, not really taken a breath yet. I think it was [Argentinian coach Marcelo] Bielsa who said "if you want to be the best in something, you pay with your happiness". You have to forfeit other things. I enjoy the day-to-day work now, I am a football person, but of course you don't get to do other things.

What other things would you like to do?
Spend more time with my daughters, read, head out to the mountains, do some sport. I'll do them when I've stopped coaching.

You're a fan of English football too...
I was there for Boxing Day. I went to watch Chelsea v West Ham in the morning and then Arsenal in the afternoon. I go at Christmas: grab my rucksack, my gloves, a scarf, and off I go.

Do you follow an English team?
I've always been a Liverpool fan.

And a favourite player?
I like [Jamie] Carragher: personality, leadership, tough. There are players like Gerrard, Souness, Dalglish who have more class, yes, but he was my kind of player.

You'd like to be a poet, too...
A bertsolari, yes. It's a kind of traditional Basque street poet and I have always been fascinated by that, by everything about it. I have friends who are bertsolaris and I follow it closely. The bertso is improvised poetry, almost musical, respecting a rhythm and certain structural rules.

Are there any about Eibar?
There will be, yes. But you have to be very, very, very intelligent to be a bertsolari and I don't have that. The use of language is incredible; they're like the Messi or Ronaldo of street poetry.

Speaking of which, what Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo earn themselves in a year is more than Eibar's entire budget...
It's always been that way, but the gap is growing. Ronaldo earns what he is worth in the market, he generates that money so that his club can pay him. It's supply and demand. It's the way it is, but that is what we're competing against.

You weren't even the biggest team in the second tier. Or, in fact, the third-tier Segunda Division B...
We're used to playing against teams that are better than us, having to fight to reach their level. The key is knowing that. I don't think feeling inferior is something to be ashamed of, or even a problem. It makes you stronger. Don't be scared, but do know that you're competing against players who are better than you. Being inferior is not something to hide from; it's good to know what you're up against. The day that you play *tu a tu* – that you see yourself as equals – you're lost. We can't forget where we come from; the day we do, we'll have a problem. We never play *tu a tu*. I admire teams that do, but I don't like it. We don't have the same power and potential as other teams. We play to win and playing *tu a tu* would make winning less likely, not more.

Curiously, your results are actually better away from home. Is that a reflection of what you're saying?
Yes. We have more space away. Technical quality really tells in small spaces. When you have no space, you need quality. The bigger the pitch, the more you can impose other virtues: your physical condition, your speed. You don't need to be so exquisite. Our pitch is quite small; not as small as people say, but ▸

Playing with the big boys...Eibar's Mikel Arruabarrena (right, in red and blue) competes with Raul Garcia of Atletico Madrid

quite small. I think it's logical. It happened in the second division as well.

When you started this season, seven of your starting XI had played against Oviedo in the Segunda Division B play-off...
Yes, and lots of those who play every week were with us in the Segunda Division B. They know each other, they mix well, they have shared experiences but it is true that the jump from the Segunda Division B to the second division and from there to the first division is a very big one and the demands are huge. They have evolved. They're the same people but not the same players. They have worked very hard to improve.

In terms of talent, can a player improve?
Talent? What is talent? Messi's talent is innate but a 30-year-old can improve his left foot, perfectly. Or you can improve your physical condition Sure, innate talent like Messi's: either you have or you don't. But a footballer can get better technically, tactically, physically. You can't set limits. You can work on that. Football is more and more personalised: every player has individual needs and we do that work one on one: there's bespoke training. A player can say he wants to work on something – and the initiative is better if it comes from them – and you build a plan. It can't be an imposition. Players come back in the afternoon to do extra work on top of what we do in the morning.

Respect...the Eibar boss admired Jamie Carragher's personalty and leadership qualities

How do you identify weaknesses and areas to work on? Is that intuitive or based on hard data?
Football will never be entirely mathematical, but with every passing day it's more information-driven. We know distances, intensity, the effort expended by every muscle, passes, everything. You can control the variables more than ever before, which means you can have a much more defined plan of action. Usually that information confirms what you thought but sometimes it does the opposite. There are some players who "con" you; sometimes you think something has happened in a game and the statistics show something else happened.

What's a typical week's work like?
On Monday, or the day after the game, we'll work with those who have not played so that they have a heavy workload, despite not having played. Then the next day is a day off. Then we start strength training, in reduced spaces. On Thursdays, we'll work on a full pitch; that's the big session in the build-up to the game. On Friday, we'll work on set-plays and dead-balls, and we'll work through some of the ideas of the game: who we think are going to play, what we expect, the opponents' weak points and so on.

Is that work the same as when you were in the Segunda Division B?
Yes. There are more of us now, there's a bigger staff, but the approach is the same. The worst place you can watch a game is from the dugout but I have two people up in the stand passing me information, things I might not have seen, and we had that back then. We eat together every day at the club. We were very professional in the Segunda Division B and the identity remains the same.

Can you define that identity?
We want to be very competitive...very, very competitive. That's why I admire Atletico Madrid. They run, suffer, never give up; they're ready to play, whether it's a good pitch or a muddy one, in front of 1,000 fans or 20,000 fans. I want my team to show solidarity, to be brave, not scared of anyone. I want us to be hungry, keen to improve. There's 4-4-2 and 4-2-3-1, different styles, longer, shorter, but beyond that there's character and ambition. Everyone has to share that. The team comes first, always.

And if a player doesn't have that attitude?
If they don't fit the ideas we have, they don't come. We sign talented players but they have to run and work and give themselves to the team. If he doesn't, we don't want him. We've had players like that – not many, fortunately – and they haven't been here for long.

What's the last thing you tell your players before they go out to play?
As they go out, one by one, I whack them in the chest to get them going. Our results haven't been good lately. I'll have to hit them harder.

Interview by Sid Lowe

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April 2003

Turkish delight and an as-yet-unknown "Special One"

Hasan Sas, who was one of Turkey's key performers in the side that finished third at the 2002 World Cup, adorned the cover of World Soccer, accompanied by the headline "Coming to Get You!"

Our correspondent in Istanbul, Suna Erdem, reported on the eve of a Euro 2004 qualifier away to England – where an 8-0 thrashing in 1987 still haunted Turkish memories – on the rise and rise of international football's former whipping boys, and how they were no longer overawed by the game's superpowers.

Inside, in a six-page Turkish special, two other stars of the World Cup success featured, with a profile of Emre Belozoglu and an interview with Ilhan Mansiz.

Meanwhile in Europe, Jose Mourinho's Porto were featured. They had just suffered their first defeat of the season, following a run of 21 unbeaten league games, including 13 straight wins. The up-and-coming coach was already showing signs of the confidence that was still over a year away from taking the Premier League by storm.

Nick Bidwell introduced the little-known Portuguese by writing: "Mourinho stunned many at his first press conference [after joining Porto in January 2002] by promising that his team would win the championship the following season. If many of the media considered his words arrogant bluster, they have since had to revise their opinions."

He continued: "Often described as cold and distant, Mourinho may not be everybody's glass of port. Yet in terms of coaching ability he is outstanding. On the training ground he is meticulous and demanding, concerned with even the smallest detail; he is also a fine strategist."

With what can now be deemed familiar arrogance, Mourinho himself was quoted as saying: "We could play Real Madrid and Barcelona and win. I'm not claiming we're unbeatable. But on a given day, we have the quality to win anywhere." Bidwell added: "Such talk may be somewhat premature. Only next season in the Champions League will Mourinho's Porto undergo the ultimate test of their mettle."

With playmaker Deco running the show on the pitch, Porto had already reached the last eight of the UEFA Cup – a tournament they would go on to win, beating Martin O'Neill's Celtic in the Final. A year later, Mourinho added the Champions League to Porto's trophy cabinet as they beat Monaco in the Final.

He would then depart for London and the rest, as they say, is history. WS

Good choice... eventual UEFA Cup winners Porto are profiled

CLUB FOCUS

FC PORTO

All for the cause...Deco's willingness to battle, allied to his superb skills, have helped keep Porto way ahead of the pack this season

The art of Deco

A Brazil-born playmaker and Bobby Robson's former No 2 are driving the Portuguese League leaders. Nick Bidwell reports

THE year 2003 is likely to be a memorable one for all connected with Futebol Clube do Porto. Despite delays to the construction of the club's new £65 million Das Antas stadium caused by political infighting over funding, the arena should be ready by September. Meanwhile the team, showing much more consistency than the bureaucrats, are overwhelming favourites to seal their first title since 1999.

Inspired by the brilliance of Brazil-born Deco in midfield, Porto were unbeaten in their first 21 League games before surprisingly slipping up 2-1 at Maritimo in mid-February – an outstanding sequence which featured 13 straight wins. They have been a class apart throughout, leaving nearest challengers Benfica trailing far behind as winter turned to spring.

It has meant total vindication for self-assured young coach Jose Mourinho, who for six years served as Bobby Robson's deputy at Sporting Lisbon, Porto and Barcelona and later worked under Louis Van Gaal at Camp Nou.

After leaving Uniao Leiria for Porto in January 2002, Mourinho stunned many at his first press conference by promising that his team would win the championship the following season. If many of the media considered his words arrogant bluster, they have since had to revise their opinions.

Often described as cold and distant, Mourinho may not be everybody's glass of port. Yet in terms of coaching ability he is outstanding. On the training ground he is meticulous and demanding, concerned with even the smallest detail; he is also a fine strategist – not surprising for someone who, as a teenager, loved to dissect the playing styles of professional teams.

Mourinho is in many ways a Portuguese version of Arrigo Sacchi, the former boss of the wonderful Milan side of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Like Sacchi, he did not make the grade as a player; like Sacchi he sets great store by a high-tempo pressing game and tactical discipline. Put simply, no other team in Portugal is better organised than Mourinho's Porto.

'I'm not saying that we're unbeatable, but on our day we have the quality to win anywhere'

Porto coach Jose Mourinho

Known as 'Ze' to his friends, Mourinho has also proved himself an excellent motivator. He has grafted an indomitable spirit on to a Porto side that used to run up the white flag a little too readily at times. It is no coincidence that the class of 2002-03 have made a habit of coming on strong in the later stages of games. While the chasing pack may hope that complacency sets in at Porto, the iron-fisted Mourinho will surely not allow that to happen.

How Benfica must wince on glancing at the League table. Mourinho was in charge there during the 2000-01 season but was sacked after just three months. It was never a particularly happy marriage. Benfica fans considered him a second-rate coach unworthy of their great club; the

24 WORLD SOCCER

> "The up-and-coming coach was already showing signs of the confidence that was still over a year away from taking the Premier League by storm" **Nick Bidwell on Porto boss Jose Mourinho**

THE SQUAD

Coaching success...Mourinho

THE COACH

Jose MOURINHO
Born: 26.01.63. After an unconvincing playing career at youth level with Belenenses and Rio Ave, Mourinho has enjoyed much more success as a coach. He was an assistant to Bobby Robson for six years at Sporting Lisbon, FC Porto and Barcelona, but when Robson left the latter for a second spell at PSV Eindhoven, Mourinho remained in Catalonia to work under Louis Van Gaal. Early in the 2000-01 season, he began to fly solo, first in a short-lived spell at Benfica, then with Uniao Leiria and FC Porto since January 2002.

GOALKEEPERS

NUNO Herlander Simoes Esprito Santo
25.01.74. Very capable deputy brought in last summer from Deportivo La Coruna, where he gained Champions League experience.

VITOR Manuel Martins BAIA
15.10.69. Long-serving keeper and club vice-captain. Has 80 caps for Portugal, but the signs are that his international career is over; new Portugal boss Luiz Felipe Scolari omitted him from the squad for the February friendly with Italy, the first time a fit Baia had been overlooked since the age of 19.

DEFENDERS

JORGE Paulo COSTA Almeida
14.10.71. While the skipper and central defender can be exposed by forwards of pace, he still has much to offer, not least his great international experience, commitment and leadership.

MARIO Fernando Magalhaes da SILVA
24.04.77. Left-back or left-sided midfielder who joined Porto in 2001 following a season of mixed emotions with Nantes. The club were champions of France but he was often on the bench. Oporto-born, he is a product of the Boavista youth system.

NUNO Jorge Pereira Silva VALENTE
12.09.74. Mourinho went back to former club Uniao Leiria to sign this adventurous left-back last summer. Technically very polished, a good dribbler and crosser, but can be drawn out of position defensively. Made his debut for Portugal against England last September.

PAULO Renato FERREIRA
18.01.79. In excellent form at right-back since arriving from Vitoria Setubal in the close season, and Mourinho appreciates his versatility. Also capped for the first time against England.

PEDRO EMANUEL dos Santos Martins Silva (Ang)
11.02.75. Centre-back who caused a storm last summer when he quit Boavista to join Porto, adding insult to injury by claiming Boavista were yesterday's club. Abrasive, and strong in the air.

RICARDO Alberto Silveira CARVALHO
18.05.78. Elegant yet competitive centre-back who is one of the most promising young players in the country. However, he has to play a waiting game at the moment because of the good form of Pedro Emanuel and Jorge Costa. Bought from Leca in 1997, he was then loaned out to Vitoria Setubal, Santa Clara and Alverca before returning to Porto in 2001.

Plenty to offer...Jorge Costa

RICARDO Miguel Moreira COSTA
16.05.81. Fine young central defender who was promoted to the first-team squad last season. Star of the Portuguese Under-21s.

In form...Paulo Ferreira

Carlos Alberto Oliveira SECRETARIO
12.05.70. The arrival of Paulo Ferreira and persistent knee trouble have restricted the first-team opportunities of this enterprising right-back. First made a name for himself at Porto in the mid-1990s, but flopped at Real Madrid in 1996. Has 35 caps for Portugal.

MIDFIELDERS

Dmitri ALENICHEV (Rus)
20.10.72. Busy, inventive Russian attacking midfielder but has never quite fulfilled his potential since leaving Moscow Spartak for the West in 1998. Moved to Porto in 2000 after two seasons in Italy with Roma and Perugia.

CAPUCHO (Nuno Fernando Goncalves Rocha)
21.02.72. At his best, the Portuguese international can do it all: win the ball, raid purposefully down the right flank and score his share of goals. But hampered by injury problems, he has not been so effective this season. Joined Porto in 1997.

COSTINHA (Francisco Jose da Costa)
01.12.74. Don't be fooled by his wiry build. The Portuguese international can tackle with the best and has the stamina to run all day. More than acceptable technically and scores goals too. Joined Porto from Monaco after starring for Portugal at Euro 2000.

DECO (Anderson Luis da Sousa)
27.08.77. Brazil-born but recently granted Portuguese citizenship, the extravagantly gifted playmaker-cum-goalscorer has been pivotal to Porto's domestic dominance this term. A consummate dribbler and free-kick expert, he played for Nacional and Corinthians of Sao Paulo before leaving for Portugal in 1997. Turned out for Alverca and Salgueiros before joining Porto in 1999. Can retaliate too easily.

MANICHE (Nuno Ricardo Oliveira Ribeiro)
11.11.77. Blew hot and cold at Benfica and was eventually released last summer. Yet at Porto the dynamic, skilful midfield all-rounder has been a revelation. His self-belief has never been greater.

TIAGO Cesar Moreira Pereira
04.07.75. Another of Mourinho's old boys from Uniao Leiria, the defensive midfielder joined Porto in the close season. Not always appreciated by the fans, but the coach likes his industry and tactical awareness.

FORWARDS

CESAR PEIXOTO Silva Jorge
12.05.80. A former Portuguese Under-21 star, this speedy left-winger has not been a regular starter since arriving from Belenenses last summer. However, the recent signs are that he is at last finding his feet.

CLAYTON Ferreira Cruz (Bra)
19.07.75. Intelligent, refined left-sided attacker whose star has waned over the past year or so. Likely to leave at the end of the season.

DERLEI (Vanderlei Fernandes Silva) (Bra)
14.07.75. Runner-up in the Portuguese scoring chart last season with 21 goals for Uniao Leiria and moved to Porto in the summer. Once with top Brazilian sides Guarani and Sao Paulo, he is being used on the left side of the Porto attack rather than in his customary central striking role.

Sharp...Helder Postiga

HELDER Manuel Marques POSTIGA
02.08.82. Extremely sharp in front of goal this season, the young striker was rewarded with a first full cap for Portugal in the friendly with Italy in February. Would have cast off in his father's fishing boat if he had not made the grade as a footballer.

Edgaras JANKAUSKAS (Lit)
12.03.75. Lithuanian bought from Real Sociedad last summer after spending the previous campaign with arch-rivals Benfica. Although not an automatic starter for Porto, he has frequently come off the bench to score vital goals. Former clubs include CSKA Moscow, Torpedo Moscow and Club Brugge.

Julio Castanheira Afonso Alves MARCO FERREIRA
12.03.78. Promising right-winger signed from Vitoria Setubal during the winter break. Won his first full cap for Portugal in a friendly against Tunisia in Lisbon last October, as a late substitute for Luis Figo.

Also in this issue...

p70 Chilean coach Manuel Pellegrini was under pressure at River Plate, who had taken just one point from their first two games of the clausura campaign. Eric Weil reported: "Pellegrini was signed after winning the league with San Lorenzo, but he has never gained popularity at River. Now he has had to face up to the fact that, although on paper he possesses the strongest squad in Argentina, his 4-2-2-2 formation is not working."

p4-5 "The bigger they are, the harder they fall," comments Keir Radnedge on a TV rights financial scandal about to hit Bayern Munich. "Yet it is the size and weight of Bayern that will, after the requisite knuckle-rapping, get the club and their directors off the hook."

p80 Following the saga of "the flying boot" after a game at Old Trafford, Brian Glanville says of Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson's "bullying" of David Beckham: "How cheap and absurd it was to try, as some did, to put the blame on David Beckham, for his silent protest, displaying his plastered brow for all the world to see. Such behaviour was surely a great deal more dignified than Ferguson's silly piece of immature petulance, the eternal bad loser, kicking that boot across the dressing room."

p20-21 A little-known local coach from Dublin, Brian Kerr had managed representative sides from under-16 to under-20 level before being promoted and put in charge of the senior Republic of Ireland team.

10 years ago

Fabio Capello's Juventus marched on in the Champions League, overturning a 1-0 first-leg defeat to beat Real Madrid 2-0 in the return and proceed to the quarter-finals. Marcelo Zalayeta scored the winner three minutes from the end of extra-time.

20 years ago

A young teenager at Real Madrid by the name of Raul Gonzalez Blanco was just completing his first season in the first team at the Santiago Bernabeu. We reported how, at the start of the season, he had replaced club legend Emilio Butragueno for his first-team debut.

30 years ago

Brazilian club side Flamengo were putting together a $3million package to buy Zico back from Udinese of Italy. Although Internazionale, Torino and Real Madrid were all interested in signing him, he chose to rejoin the team he had supported as a boy.

40 years ago

Real Madrid, Benfica and Milan were all giants of European football in the 1960s who had fallen on hard times. It would be another 14 years before Milan conquered Europe again, while Real Madrid would have to wait 23 years to do likewise. Benfica, however, are still waiting.

50 years ago

In *World Soccer*'s review of the year's international football, it was reported that a young Pat Jennings, making his debut, had the unfortunate milestone of being the goalkeeper who conceded Northern Ireland's 700th goal. It was scored by Brian Godfrey of Wales.

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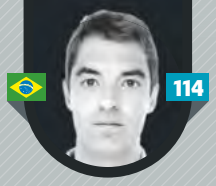

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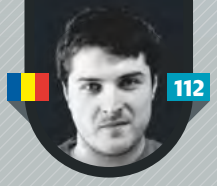

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MLS clash...Toronto (in red) and Colombus Crew

FEBRUARY 17-MARCH 19, 2015

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

➤Tuesday *Feb 17*

ARGENTINA: Gustavo Bou scores a hat-trick as Racing get this year's Libertadores Cup group stage under way with a 5-0 win in Venezuela against Deportivo Tachira.
CHINA: Guangzhou R&F will play in the AFC Champions League group phase for the first time after beating Australia's Central Coast Mariners 3-1 in the play-offs. Beijing Guoan also go through, winning 3-0 against Thai FA Cup winners Bangkok Glass.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain are held 1-1 at home by Chelsea in the first leg of their Champions League round-of-16 tie.
GERMANY: Xabi Alonso makes his 100th appearance in the Champions League but is sent off as Bayern Munich draw 0-0 away to Shakhtar Donetsk.
ITALY: Promotion-chasing Bologna are deducted one point for income-tax irregularities, while club president Albano Guaraldi is suspended for three months. Relegated from the top flight last season, Bologna are now seven points behind Serie B leaders Carpi and one point ahead of Livorno.
URUGUAY: Referee Raul Orozco brandishes five red cards as Wanderers beat Venezuelan champions Zamora 3-2 in the Libertadores Cup. He sends off two players for the hosts and three for the visitors.

Wednesday *Feb 18*

ANGOLA: Reigning league champions Recreativo do Libolo beat last season's cup-winners Benfica de Luanda on penalties in the Angolan Super Cup.
BRAZIL: Corinthians open their Libertadores Cup campaign with an impressive 2-0 win over arch-rivals Sao Paulo.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo ends a three-game goalless run in Real Madrid's 2-0 Champions League win away to Schalke.

Thursday *Feb 19*

ARGENTINA: San Lorenzo get their defence of the Libertadores Cup off to a winning start, beating Danubio 2-1 in Uruguay. River Plate lose 2-0 away to Bolivian side San Jose.
SCOTLAND: Two goals down inside 13 minutes, Celtic come back to draw 3-3 at home to Internazionale in the Europa League.

Friday *Feb 20*

FRANCE: Monaco keep a ninth clean sheet in their last 10 Ligue 1 games as they beat Cote d'Azur rivals Nice 1-0. Rennes' striker Philipp Hosiner reveals he has had his left kidney removed after a tumour was detected last month when the 25-year-old Austria international failed a medical ahead of a proposed loan move to German club Cologne.
SPAIN: Barcelona name the main pitch at their training ground after former coach Tito Vilanova, who died in April last year at the age of 45 after a long battle with throat cancer.

Saturday *Feb 21*

ALGERIA: ES Setif beat Al Ahly of Egypt on penalties, after a 1-1 draw, to win the CAF Super Cup.
ENGLAND: Nemanja Matic is sent off in Chelsea's 1-1 draw with Burnley and will miss the upcoming League Cup Final against Tottenham Hotspur. Joey Barton also sees red, in QPR's 2-1 loss at Hull City – the ninth dismissal of his career.
GERMANY: Augsburg's Marwin Hitz becomes only the third goalkeeper to score in the Bundesliga from open play as he gets an injury-time equaliser in the 2-2 draw with Bayer Leverkusen.
SPAIN: After 11 straight victories, Barcelona go down 1-0 at home to Malaga. Celta Vigo win 2-0 to do the double over Galician rivals Deportivo La Coruna.

Sunday *Feb 22*

EGYPT: Two weeks after 19 people die outside a football stadium in Cairo, Egypt withdraws its application to stage the 2017 African Nations Cup. Algeria, Gabon and Ghana are now vying to replace violence-torn Libya as hosts, with a vote to be held in April.
FAROE ISLANDS: Domestic cup winners Vikingur win the Faroese Super Cup, beating league champions B36 Torshavn on penalties following a 3-3 draw.
GREECE: Panathinaikos fans invade the pitch before kick-off and try to

Flying start...San Lorenzo (in red and black) begin their defence of the Libertadores with a victory over Danubio in Uruguay

Over...Barca lose at home to Malaga (in blue and white)

attack Olympiakos players as they warm up. After a 15-minute delay, Pana win the Athens derby 2-1 and reduce the visitors' gap at the top of the table to three points.
ITALY: Parma's home game with Udinese is postponed as they are unable to pay match-day staff.
SPAIN: Iker Casillas makes his 500th appearance in La Liga as Real Madrid win 2-0 at Elche.

Monday *Feb 23*

BELGIUM: A record crowd of 12,871 sees Anderlecht knock holders Barcelona out of the UEFA Youth League in the round of 16.
ITALY: Dries Mertens is shown a red card within five minutes after coming on as a second-half sub for a dangerous tackle on Sassuolo's Simone Missiroli, but goals from Duvan Zapata and Marek Hamsik secure a 2-0 win for Napoli who move within three points of second-placed Roma at the top of Serie A.
SERBIA: Zarko Udovicic of Novi ➤

Scorers...Zapata (left) and Hamsik

ENGLAND

GAVIN HAMILTON

No joy...Marc-Andre Ter Stegen saves Sergio Aguero's penalty kick at Camp Nou

Wiped out in Europe

Clubs fail to reach Euro quarter-finals for first time since 1992

The dust had barely settled on England's ignominious exit from the Cricket World Cup, when the country's leading football clubs posted a timely reminder that they are the true specialists in international sporting failure.

A matter of weeks after the Premier League announced a mammoth TV rights deal, all of the country's clubs crashed out of the Champions League and Europa League. For the first season since 1992-93, there will be no English clubs in the quarter-finals of the European club competitions.

Money may be no guarantee of success, but that did not deter Sky and BT from offering a record £5.136billion - up from the current £3.018bn - to screen Premier League games for three years from the 2016-17 season. The TV companies will be paying £10.2million for every game that is screened live, while even the club that finishes bottom of the league in 2016-17 will receive £99m in prize money

It is in the context of the vast wealth flowing into English football that the latest European failure must be assessed.

Chelsea had beaten Paris Saint-Germain in last season's quarter-finals but they came unstuck this year as coach Jose Mourinho's safety-first tactics got the better of them. Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers, cynically pressurised by Chelsea players, harshly sent off PSG talisman Zlatan Ibrahimovic but Chelsea lacked the attacking imagination to unlock the Parisian defence.

By contrast, Arsenal offered plenty in attack against Monaco, but defensive and tactical errors proved costly.

Premier League champions Manchester City had the toughest task against Barcelona, especially with Lionel Messi in imperious form, even though the Argentinian missed a penalty in the first leg in Manchester. But needing a result in the return, City showed little desire and were fortunate that keeper Joe Hart produced the best performance of his career to deny Barca's three-pronged attack of Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez.

The inquest into English failure centred on the high-energy tactics employed in the Premier League and the lack of a winter break.

Defenders of English football will point to the 5-0 aggregate thrashing suffered by Bayern Munich at the hands of Real Madrid in the semi-finals of last year's competition as proof that nobody is invincible in the Champions League. Indeed, no club has retained the title since Milan in 1990.

But perhaps there is a simpler explanation for English failure. Money does not guarantee success, but financial power has come to be regarded as the most important factor by all of England's top clubs. The wealth enjoyed by English clubs as a result of their global TV exposure may have forced them to take their eye of the ball and ignore other important factors, such as youth development, tactics and good old team spirit.

Everton were applauded for their ambition when they spent £28m on Romelu Lukaku last summer. It was a signal that they meant business in Europe. But their defeat by Dynamo Kiev ended English involvement in this year's European competitions.

Money may not be the solution, after all. WS

John Duerden
CHINA

Preview

Power shift in east Asia

Big signings prove the Super League is going from strength to strength

Their arrival didn't make as many headlines as those of Fabio Cannavaro, Ricardo Goulart and Tim Cahill, but perhaps the most significant signings made by Chinese clubs in the close season were Serbian pair Danko Lazovic and Nenad Milijas.

They were signed respectively by Beijing BG and Hebei CFFC – and when Chinese second-tier sides are bringing in recent internationals beyond the means of most clubs in Japan and South Korea's top flights, it is clear the east Asian football scene is changing.

Chinese Super League clubs are showing no sign of reigning things in either, having been more active than ever in the market as the new season began.

Although the departure of coach Marcello Lippi after 30 successful months should make it a little easier, Guangzhou Evergrande – seeking a fifth successive league title – are still the team to beat. The appointment of Lippi's 2006 World Cup-winning captain Fabio Cannavaro is a gamble, but at least he can count on a team full of Chinese internationals, including captain Zheng Zhi, striker Gao Lin and highly rated defender Zhang Linpeng. The Italian's fellow countrymen Alessandro Diamanti and Alberto Gilardino have been loaned back to Fiorentina, but there's still plenty of quality of the Brazilian kind.

On the move... Conca has joined Shanghai SIPG

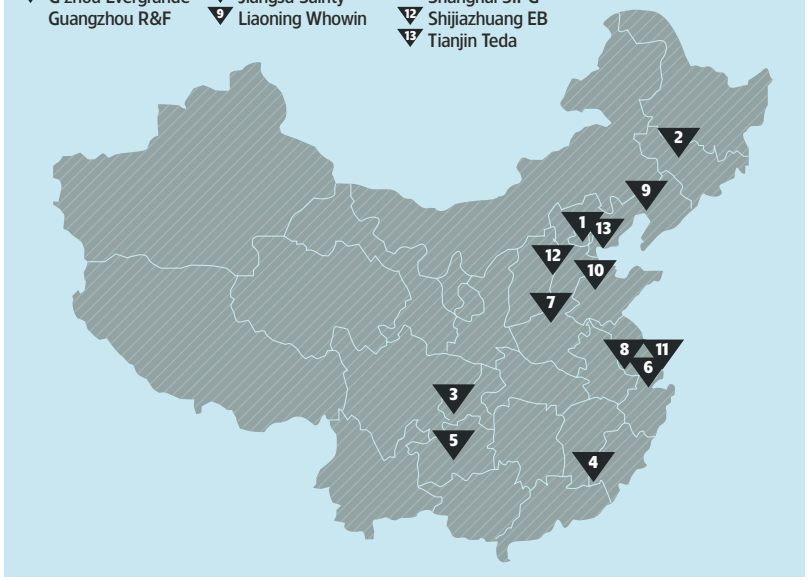
Before the start of this campaign, striker Elkeson had scored 52 goals in 56 CSL games and recently signed a new four-year contract. He has been joined by Goulart, one of the top scorers in the Brazilian league last season and perhaps the biggest signing in Asia this winter at €15million from Cruzeiro. Another forward, Alan, was an €11m buy from Austrian club Salzburg.

Keeping up with the defending champions is not cheap. Shanghai SIPG finished ninth in 2013, fifth last season and now they want more. In December they tempted Sven-Goran Eriksson from Guangzhou R&F and the Swede has signed Dario Conca, the Argentinian hero of Guangzhou Evergrande's 2013 Asian title and a former player of the year in both China and Brazil. He is joined by Seoul defender Kim Ju-young, adding to the growing number of South Korea internationals in the league.

Guangzhou R&F finished third last term and ended the campaign by replacing Eriksson with Cosmin Contra of Spain's Getafe. He brought playmaker Michel Herrero with him and managed to keep hold of Moroccan hotshot Abderrazak Hamdallah. Jiangsu Sainty will look to winger Sun Ke, one of China's stars at this year's Asian Cup,

CHINESE SUPER LEAGUE 2015

1. Beijing Guoan
2. Changchun Yatai
3. Chongqing Lifan
4. G'zhou Evergrande Guangzhou R&F
5. Guizhou Renhe
6. Hangzhou G'town
7. Henan Jianye
8. Jiangsu Sainty
9. Liaoning Whowin
10. Shandong Luneng
11. Shanghai Shenhua Shanghai Shenxin Shanghai SIPG
12. Shijiazhuang EB
13. Tianjin Teda



Prolific...Brazilian striker Elkeson of champions Guangzhou Evergrande (in yellow)

while Brazil-born former Croatia star Sammir from Getafe will help boost creativity levels alongside Icelandic duo Solvi Ottesen and Vidar Orn Kjartansson.

Although R&F, SIPG and Jiangsu are not traditional powerhouses, they are being propelled by the new money injected into Chinese football in recent years, much of it from companies that initially made a fortune in property development. Of the old guard, Beijing Guoan, especially, have had their nose put out of joint by the new arrivals, but the 2009 champions are not short of cash. The attack is led by Montenegro marksman Dejan Damjanovic, who scored against England in both 2014 World Cup qualifiers, and he is supported by Erton Fejzullahu of Sweden, Pablo Batalla from Argentina and Croatia's Darko Matic.

The last team to deny Guangzhou Evergrande the title, 2010 champions Shandong Luneng, replaced Wagner Love with Diego Tardelli, while former Everton and New York Red Bulls midfielder Cahill was snapped up by Shanghai Shenhua. That the 35-year-old Australia star chose a mid-table Chinese club is proof the CSL is a very different beast these days. WS

KEY DATES
SEASON STARTED March 7, 2015
SEASON ENDS October 31, 2015

➤ Pazar has a gun pointed at his head by a fan in the dressing room after a training session. The supporter accuses him of deliberately missing a penalty in the 1-0 defeat to Rad Belgrade at the weekend.

SPAIN: Three players are sent off in the relegation battle between Levante and Granada as two late goals in the last two minutes secure a 2-1 victory for Levante.

Tuesday *Feb 24*

ENGLAND: Luis Suarez returns to an English stadium for the first time since leaving Liverpool and scores both goals as Barcelona secure a 2-1 first-leg win away to Manchester City in the Champions League round of 16. Chelsea's Nemanja Matic, who was sent off against Burnley at the weekend, has his initial three-match ban reduced to two games but will still miss the League Cup Final.

ITALY: Alvaro Morata's first goal in the Champions League secures a 2-1 first-leg win in the round of 16 for Juventus at home to Borussia Dortmund. The *Derby della Lanterna* ends 1-1 after Sampdoria's Eder equalises two minutes after Iago Falque's 17th-minute opener for Genoa.

JAPAN: Winners in 2008, Gamba Osaka crash to an opening-day defeat in the AFC Champions League, losing 2-0 at home to Chinese club Guangzhou R&F.

MEXICO: Pachuca fight back from two goals down to secure a 2-2 draw at home to Montreal Impact in the first leg of their CONCACAF Champions League quarter-final.

QATAR: A FIFA task force recommends that the 2022 World Cup is played in Qatar in the months of November and December.

USA: Kaka is named captain of Orlando City for their inaugural season in MLS.

Wednesday *Feb 25*

ARGENTINA: Gustavo Bou scores a second successive hat-trick in the Libertadores Cup as Racing beat Guarani of Paraguay 4-1. Guido Carrillo also scores a hat-trick as Estudiantes beat Barcelona of Ecuador 3-0.

BRAZIL: Atletico Mineiro lose 1-0 at home to Mexican club Atlas to sit bottom of their Libertadores group.

ENGLAND: Arsenal lose 3-1 at home to Monaco in their Champions League round of 16 first-leg game, with former Tottenham Hotspur forward Dimitar Berbatov scoring one of the goals.

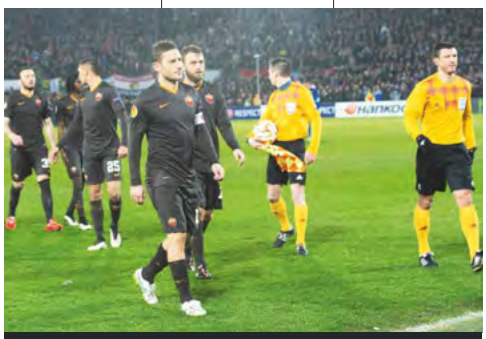
GERMANY: Eight players are booked and Atletico Madrid's Tiago is sent off as Bayer Leverkusen win 1-0 in the Champions League round of 16.

GREECE: All professional football is suspended for one week by the new Greek government following violent scenes on and off the pitch at the Panathinaikos-Olympiakos game.

ROMANIA: UEFA announce that Steaua Bucharest must play their next two home games in Europe behind closed doors after their fans are found guilty of racist behaviour for the third time this season, having unfurled an offensive banner at the Europa League match with Dynamo Kiev in December 2014.

Thursday *Feb 26*

EGYPT: The Egyptian football federation announce that the league will resume in March, but all matches must be played behind closed doors, following a spate of violence and deaths prior to a game in Cairo in early February.


Suspended...crowd trouble halts Feyenoord's game with Roma

GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp is forced to relocate a press conference after an unexploded bomb is found near the Signal Iduna Park stadium.

HOLLAND: Crowd trouble affects the second leg of the Europa League tie between Feyenoord and Roma. The referee takes the teams off the pitch for 10 minutes in the second half as the Italian side go through 3-2 on aggregate.

SPAIN: Granada's Youssef El Arabi and Levante's Ivan Ramis are given four-match bans after being sent off "for violent conduct in an off-the-ball incident" in Monday's game between the two clubs.

TURKEY: Besiktas knock Liverpool out of the Europa League on penalties as the English side's Dejan Lovren is the only player to miss in the shoot-out.

UAE: National coach Mahdi Ali signs a new three-year contract.

Friday *Feb 27*

ARGENTINA: Daniel Osvaldo, on loan from Southampton, makes his debut for Boca Juniors and scores ➤

➤ the winner in their 2-1 win against Wanderers of Uruguay in the Libertadores Cup.
FRANCE: Third-placed Marseille let a two-goal lead slip at home to struggling Caen and lose 3-2.
GREECE: Panathinaikos are docked three points by the Greek Super League for crowd trouble during last Sunday's win against Olympiakos and ordered to play their next two home games behind closed doors.
ITALY: Parma postpone a second consecutive game after their players refuse to play against Genoa on Sunday, with the club in dire financial trouble and not able to pay its staff.

Saturday *Feb 28*

AUSTRALIA: Sydney triumph in the local derby with a 4-3 victory at Western Sydney Wanderers' Pirtek Stadium in Parramatta.
FRANCE: Ligue 1 leaders Lyon suffer their first league defeat since the end of November as they go down 2-1 away to Lille.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund beat Schalke 3-0 at home in the Ruhr derby.
JAPAN: Gamba Osaka beat Urawa Red Diamonds 2-0 to win the Japanese Super Cup and complete a full set of trophies, having already been successful in the 2014 J-League title, the J.League Cup and the Emperor's Cup.
PORTUGAL: The match between Nacional and Vitoria Setubal is abandoned after 12 minutes due to severe fog with the score at 0-0.
SCOTLAND: Hearts beat Cowdenbeath 10-0 in the second-tier Scottish Championship, with Dutch forward Genero Zeefuik scoring a first-half hat-trick in just four minutes.

Derby day...Sydney (blue) and Wanderers

Romania

EMMANUEL ROSU

Domestic clubs in cash crisis

Rising debts are a worry for all

The financial crisis in Romanian football has hit a new low this year. With seven top-flight clubs now facing bankruptcy, the league is struggling to find a way out of possible extinction. Players left unpaid for months, depressed fans, rotten stadiums – this is the raw image of the domestic game, with almost half of the Liga I clubs on the verge of disaster.

The millionaire owners who used to act as local oligarchs have lost almost all interest and many have been sentenced to jail in cases related to football. Bucharest clubs Steaua, Dinamo and Rapid – who are the three most important teams of the past 25 years – have all seen their leaders put behind bars.

Dinamo's Cristi Borcea and George Copos of Rapid sold their shares only months before going to jail, yet, notoriously, Gigi Becali continues to call the shots at Steaua. Sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison in May 2013, he continues to run Steaua by making regular phone calls made from his cell.

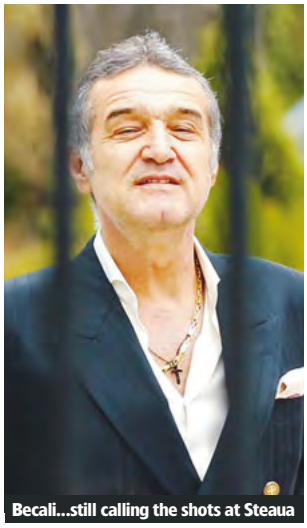
"We are in contact with the owner all the time," says current Steaua chairman Valeriu Argaseala. "It's normal, it's his club, he helps us a lot with everything we do over here."

In all, nine of the clubs which compete in the top tier of Romanian football have seen their current or former chief executives brought to court.

Former champions Unirea Urziceni were dissolved only two years after participating in the Champions League group stage in 2009 and the millions made by the club following a successful European campaign provided the owner with capital to invest in luxury real estate. The same scheme also applied at Otelul, who were league champions of 2011. The Galati-based club is now facing bankruptcy after more then €10million disappeared from its account.

Worry...Petrolul fans are among those fearing the worst for their club

> "The league will become a horror scene"
> Former Romanian League president Dumitru Dragomir


Becali...still calling the shots at Steaua

Poli Timisoara, Arges, Vaslui, Universitatea Craiova and Gloria Bistrita – who are all important top-division names and European contenders – have disappeared in the last three years.

The lack of a sustainable business model or any kind of "Plan B" made them all dependent on the money which stopped coming in from owners. The annual TV rights deal of €27.5m was divided between clubs depending on their league position. It became the only trusted source of income in a dubious environment.

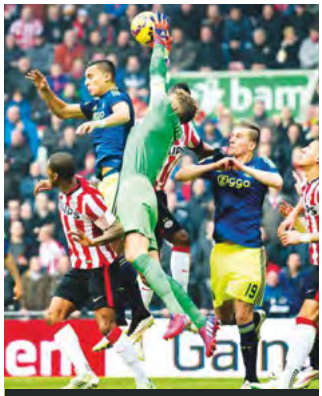
Abandoned by fans and sponsors, the majority of the Romanian teams are now trying to reinvent themselves.

"The league will become a horror scene," says former Romanian League president Dumitru Dragomir. "I told people about this years ago, but nobody believed me. If something doesn't happen quickly, if something doesn't change, we won't be able to save anything.

"I don't know how many clubs will start next

Sunday *Mar 1*

ARGENTINA: Eleven yellow cards and two red cards are shown during the La Plata derby as Estudiantes beat Gimnasia 3-1.
ENGLAND: Chelsea beat Tottenham Hotspur 2-0 to win the League Cup Final. And in the league, their closest challengers Manchester City lose 2-1 away to Liverpool.
FRANCE: Monaco and Paris Saint-Germain fail to capitalise on Lyon's defeat the previous day and play out a goalless draw.
HOLLAND: PSV's 100 per cent home record in the league comes to an end as Ajax win 3-1.
MALI: A 2-0 victory over South Africa in the Final of the African Under-17 Championship gives Mali a first-ever continental title. Guinea and Nigeria join the finalists in qualifying for the Under-17 World Cup in Chile later this year.
PERU: Juan Aurich striker Luis Tejada walks off the pitch during a Copa Inca match away to Cienciano in protest at racist abuse. The match finishes 2-0 to the hosts.
PORTUGAL: A hat-trick from Cristian Tello gives second-placed Porto a 3-0 win against third-place Sporting Lisbon..


Run over...PSV (in red) and Ajax

Monday *Mar 2*

ARGENTINA: Velez Sarsfield miss out on the chance to join Estudiantes, Boca Juniors and Rosario Central at the top of the league table as they are held to a goalless draw by Newell's Old Boys.
ENGLAND: Sunderland defender Wes Brown has the red card that he was shown against Manchester United at the weekend rescinded, while team-mate Adam Johnson is arrested over alleged sexual activity with a 15-year-old girl.
ITALY: Roma and Juventus draw 1-1 in their top-of-the-table clash in Serie A.

Tuesday *Mar 3*

JAPAN: Gamba Osaka find themselves at the bottom of their AFC Champions League group as they lose 2-0 away to Seongnam.
SOUTH KOREA: Jeonbuk Motors win 4-1 away to Shandong Luneng to remain unbeaten after their opening two AFC Champions League group games.

Wednesday *Mar 4*

ENGLAND: Swansea City striker Bafetimbi Gomis faints during his side's 3-2 defeat at Tottenham Hotspur. The 29-year-old Frenchman, who collapsed three times in 2009, is taken to hospital but later released. Newcastle United's Jonas Gutierrez plays his first game since recovering from testicular cancer, appearing as a sub in a 1-0 defeat by Manchester United.

Concern...Gomis is carried off

FRANCE: Goals from David Luiz and Edinson Cavani see Paris Saint-Germain reach the French Cup semi-finals with a 2-0 win at home to Monaco, three days after the two sides drew 0-0 on the south coast in the league.
GERMANY: Third-tier side Arminia Bielefeld continue their ➤

season, how many of the people who now give money from their own pocket will continue to do so. It's a horror scene."

With debts ranging from a couple of hundred thousand euros (Brasov) to € 10m (CFR Cluj, Rapid, Dinamo), the clubs want to find ways of attracting investments from abroad.

"I am always willing to negotiate," confesses Dinamo boss Ionut Negoita. "If someone can do more than me, he's welcome to do it. I put the club back on track, but if someone can make the next step, I'm here to talk with them.

"The debts were huge, the contracts I inherited were scandalous. We had too many employees. This company was a fantastic challenge for me."

While Dinamo and Rapid hope to overcome insolvency by the end of this year, CFR Cluj, Petrolul, Otelul, Universitatea Cluj and Brasov can only hope to avoid a terrible ending. So far CFR Cluj, who have been docked 24 points, are the only team to have points deducted because of the debts.

"Clubs ask to enter insolvency in order to avoid paying all the money they owe," explains Romanian FA general secretary Gheorghe Chivorchian. "It will be different from now on. Nobody will be able to use this weapon in front of the creditors during a season. What we can do is apply point deductions and we'll do it starting next season."

The Romanian Professional League, which oversees the top division, also wants to make its product more appealing to its audience. Six teams will get relegated at the end of this season, while only two will gain promotion from the second league. Liga I will use a play-off system in a new 14-club division.

Until Romanian football finds its way out of bankruptcy, fans all around the continent should pay attention to Liga I's European teams next season. With UEFA banning insolvent clubs from taking part in its competitions, it will take a game of charades to decide who to send among Europe's greats. WS

➤ giant-killing run in the German Cup, beating top-flight Werder Bremen 3-1 at home to progress to the quarter-finals.
GREECE: The government rules that Super League games can resume at the weekend, after last week's postponement due to crowd violence, but matches must be played behind closed doors.
HOLLAND: Twente are docked three points by the Dutch FA for failing to address financial problems.
ITALY: Cup holders Napoli are held 1-1 at Lazio in the first leg of their semi-final clash.
SCOTLAND: St Johnstone end league leaders Celtic's eight-match winning run in the Premiership with a 1-0 win at Celtic Park.
SPAIN: Barcelona win 3-1 at Villarreal, and 6-2 on aggregate, to proceed to the Spanish Cup Final on May 30, where they will meet Athletic Bilbao who beat Espanyol 2-0 and go through 3-1 on aggregate.
UKRAINE: Dynamo Kiev are punished with a partial stadium closure following crowd trouble during their Europa League victory against Guingamp in February.
USA: Former Brazil star Ronaldo, who is part owner of Fort Lauderdale Strikers, denies rumours that he will come out of retirement and play for the second-tier North American Soccer League side. The 38-year-old described the story as "just nonsense from the Twitter crowd".

Thursday *Mar 5*

BRAZIL: Corinthians beat defending champions San Lorenzo of Argentina 1-0 away in the Libertadores Cup with a goal from Elias. Internacional surrender the lead and then come from behind to overcome Emelec of Ecuador 3-2 in their group game.
COSTA RICA: Herediano reach the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Champions League for the first time, beating Olimpia 2-0 to go through 3-1 on aggregate. They join fellow Costa Ricans Alajuelense in the last four, along with America of Mexico and Montreal Impact, the Canadian side who play in MLS.
FRANCE: An injury-time goal from Guingamp's Claudio Beauvue sees off fourth-division amateurs Concarneau in the quarter-finals of the French Cup as the holders win 2-1. Auxerre beat Brest on penalties after their tie finished goalless after extra time.
ITALY: Two goals from Chelsea loanee Mohamed Salah give Fiorentina a 2-1 advantage after the away leg of their Italian Cup

Brazil

TIM VICKERY

A lesson yet to be learned

Domestic stars now leaving for second-string leagues

One of the most important developments in Brazilian football came as a consequence of an external shock. In December 1932, Brazil won 2-1 away to then-world champions Uruguay and the standout players were two youngsters: elegant centre-back Domingos Da Guia and explosive centre-forward Leonidas Da Silva.

Uruguayan football had just gone professional – a move the Brazilian game was actively resisting – and so Uruguay's two biggest clubs took advantage, with Penarol signing Leonidas and Nacional snapping up Domingos.

Losing these two young stars tipped the balance in a debate that had been raging in Brazil for a decade, and in 1933 a professional league was formed in Rio, then the country's capital. The national team's participation in the following year's World Cup was still overshadowed by rows over the issue, but by 1938 the question had been resolved and, with Leonidas and Domingos playing starring roles, Brazil reached the semi-finals in France.

There is little doubt that professionalism would have happened sooner or later, but the process was given a considerable boost by the brief loss of the two young stars. The external shock led to professionalism, which in turn led to Pele and an era of global dominance.

Fast forward more than 80 years and there is a new kind of external shock. Now it is not only Europe that is helping itself to Brazilian talent.

Growing leagues such as the USA and, specifically, China, are also getting into the act. Diego Tardelli (see profile, page 86), a success since being introduced to the national team after the World Cup, moved to Shandong Luneng at the start of the year and has now become the first China-based player to be called up by Brazil. Announcing the squad, coach Dunga claimed that striker Tardelli – who has had three unsuccessful spells in Europe – had moved to the Far East because European clubs could no longer afford to buy the best, which is a clearly ludicrous claim. Real Madrid had no hesitation in shelling out for Cruzeiro's Lucas Silva, who as a central midfielder with a fine range of passing is a rarity in contemporary Brazilian football.

Meanwhile, attacking midfielder Ricardo Goulart followed Tardelli to China, joining Guangzhou Evergrande from Cruzeiro, leaving the great Tostao to comment that "the loss of two of the best players in the last Brazilian championship shows that the Chinese are

Welcome...Goulart (no11) celebrates with Chinese fans

Success... Tardelli was a Libertadores winner with Atletico Mineiro and twice won the Brazilian championship

strong financially and the Europeans are losing interest in our players".

But while some business-minded commentators in Brazil are concerned by the rise of leagues such as China and the USA, those who run the game seem blithely unaware of any problems. Indeed, there is even a proposal for some kind of return to the old play-off format, which was replaced in 2003 by the current national championship format.

The idea is for the clubs that finish in the top four places in the league to then have two-legged semi-finals ahead of a home-and-away decider. This would add yet more games to a calendar which is already so cluttered that it cannot stop for FIFA dates. It would also effectively turn almost the entire year into a glorified pre-season. The appalling state championships, the real villain of the calendar, are broadly seen as a pre-season, and under this proposal the national league would chug along as a low-key warm-up for the gripping finale.

So if the shock of the 1930s was enough to propel Brazilian football to a bright future, the worrying events eight decades later – and there have been plenty – do not appear to be having the same effect. **WS**

> **"The loss of two of the best players in the last Brazilian championship shows that the Chinese are strong financially and the Europeans are losing interest in our players"** Tostao

semi-final to end Juventus' 47-game unbeaten home run.

MEXICO: Former under-23 international striker Julio Nava of top-flight side Chiapas is suspended for eight months after being found guilty of using a banned substance.

Friday *Mar 6*

AUSTRALIA: Marc Janko equals Besart Berisha's A-League record by scoring in a sixth consecutive game as Sydney beat Newcastle Jets 1-0 to go second in the table.

ENGLAND: The FA announces that Martin Glenn will replace general-secretary Alex Horne as its new chief executive on May 18.

FRANCE: Marseille thrash Toulouse 6-1 to go second in Ligue 1.

GIBRALTAR: David Wilson, a Scotsman from North Ayrshire, will lead Gibraltar out at Hampden Park in the Euro qualifier against Scotland later in the month after being named caretaker coach.

NIGERIA: Five players from defending champions Kano Pillars are shot when gunmen attack the club bus ahead of the start of the Nigerian Premier League season. Saturday's opening game against Heartland is postponed.

SCOTLAND: Dave King, Paul Murray and John Gilligan are voted on to the Rangers board by shareholders at an extraordinary general meeting, while Derek Llambias and finance director Barry Leach are removed. Murray becomes interim chairman.

USA: Jose Villarreal and Robbie Keane are both on target as defending league champions Los Angeles Galaxy open the new MLS season with a 2-0 victory against Chicago Fire.

Saturday *Mar 7*

ENGLAND: The FA bans Manchester United's Jonny Evans for six games and Newcastle United's Papiss Cisse for seven matches for spitting during the visitors' 1-0 win at Newcastle on Wednesday.

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain go top of Ligue 1 with an emphatic 4-1 victory over Lens.

GERMANY: Bayern Munich fall behind for only the fourth time in the Bundesliga this season, but recover to beat Hanover 3-1. Second-placed Wolfsburg lose for the first time since November, going down 1-0 at Augsburg to Dominik Kohr's second-half penalty.

HOLLAND: Substitute Stefan Nijland scores a hat-trick as PEC Zwolle beat Cambuur 6-1 in the Eredivisie.

ITALY: Samuel Eto'o scores his first goal since joining Sampdoria in a ➤

➤ 2-0 home win against Cagliari.
JAPAN: Defending champions Gamba Osaka surrender a two-goal lead on the opening day of the new J.League season to draw 2-2 at home to Tokyo.
RUSSIA: Salomon Rondon scores a hat-trick as Zenit beat Ural 3-0 as the Russian Premier League restarts and they retain their seven-point lead over CSKA Moscow, who won 2-1 at Terek Grozny.
SOUTH AFRICA: Kaizer Chiefs extend their lead at the top of the table to 11 points with a goalless draw against Orlando Pirates.
SOUTH KOREA: Brazilian import Edu scores twice as Jeonbuk Motors begin the defence of their K-League Classic title with a 2-0 victory over Seongnam.
SPAIN: A first-half header by Aritz Aduriz gives Athletic Bilbao a 1-0 win over La Liga leaders Real Madrid. Sevilla come from behind to win 4-3 at struggling Deportivo La Coruna.

Sunday *Mar 8*

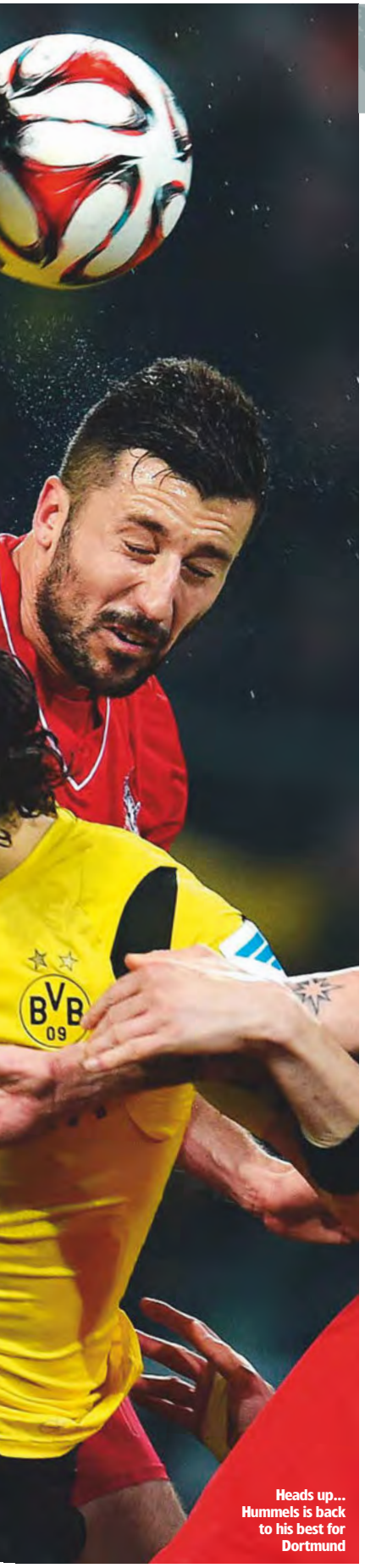
CHINA: Shanghai Shenhua thrash their city rivals Shanghai Shenxin 6-2 in the opening round of Chinese Super League games.
ENGLAND: Championship side Blackburn Rovers earn a replay with a 0-0 draw at Liverpool in the sixth round of the FA Cup.
FRANCE: Lyon return to the top of the league with a 5-1 victory over Montpellier, having trailed to an early goal.
GERMANY: Cologne win at home for only the second time this season, beating Eintracht Frankfurt 4-2.
GREECE: Marcus Berg scores a hat-trick as Panathinaikos beat PAOK 4-3 in an empty stadium after fans are banned following violent incidents two weeks ago.
ITALY: Roma draw for an eighth time in nine Italian Serie A games and lose further ground in the title race with a 0-0 stalemate at Chievo. Debt-ridden Parma, whose last two matches were cancelled, earn a point with a 0-0 draw at home to Atalanta.
SPAIN: Barcelona go top of La Liga for the first time since early November as Lionel Messi scores a 12-minute hat-trick in a 6-1 thrashing of Rayo Vallecano. Villarreal beat Celta Vigo 4-1 for an eighth straight home league win, while third-place Atletico Madrid draw 1-1 with fourth-place Valencia.
TURKEY: Fenerbahce stretch their unbeaten run at home against Galatasaray to 12 league games as Dirk Kuyt gives them a 1-0 win over the league leaders and closes the gap between the two to one point. Second-placed Besiktas' 1-0 victory at lowly Sivasspor moves them level with Galatasaray.
USA: Kaka scores an injury-time free-kick on his MLS debut as Orlando City snatch a 1-1 draw with fellow newcomers New York City in front of a 62,510 crowd at the Florida Citrus Bowl stadium.
UZBEKISTAN: Cup holders Lokomotiv Tashkent beat reigning league champions Pakhtakor 4-0 to win the Uzbekistan Super Cup.

Monday *Mar 9*

AFC: United Arab Emirates wins the vote to host the 2019 Asian Cup, ahead of Iran. UAE staged the tournament in 1996 and lost in the Final, on penalties to Saudi Arabia.
ARGENTINA: Estudiantes miss their chance to go top of the league, losing 2-0 at home to San Lorenzo.
CHINA: Reigning champions Guangzhou Evergrande come from behind and then score in the fifth minute of injury time to get their title defence off to a winning start with a 2-1 victory over promoted Shijiazhuang Yongchang.

Unseen...Panathinaikos hat-trick hero Berg (right)

ENGLAND: Danny Welbeck scores the winner as Arsenal win 2-1 at his former club Manchester United to reach the semi-finals of the FA Cup, where they will face Bradford City or Reading. Aston Villa face Liverpool or Blackburn Rovers in the other semi.
ITALY: Miroslav Klose is on target twice as Lazio move into the Champions League qualification spots on goal difference with a 4-0 win at home to fifth-place Fiorentina. Juventus increase their lead at the top to 11 points with a 1-0 win at home to Sassuolo.
PORTUGAL: Sporting Lisbon surrender a 2-0 lead at home to bottom club Penafiel before winning 3-2 in a game that saw red cards for Sporting's Tobias Figueiredo and the visitors' Dani and Pedro Ribeiro.
SPAIN: Bottom of the table ➤



Heads up... Hummels is back to his best for Dortmund

Germany

NICK BIDWELL

Dortmund are back

Klopp's men are alive and kicking

Over the years a number of famous individuals – Mark Twain, Alfred Nobel, Ernest Hemingway – have lived to read their own obituaries. And Borussia Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp and his players certainly know the feeling, having been declared dead and buried after losing no fewer than 10 games before Christmas, but now roaring back up the table.

A comfortable 3-0 home victory over Schalke in the Ruhr derby was the Westfalen outfit's fourth consecutive win in the league. With confidence and hunger restored, key players such as centre-back Mats Hummels and midfield regulator Ilkay Gundogan rediscovering their form, and Marco Reus and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang running riot in attack, they could conceivably still qualify for next season's Champions League.

A former Dortmund player himself, Augsburg general-manager Stefan Reuter clearly did not get the joke when pranksters Reus and Aubameyang donned Batman and Robin masks to celebrate their side's first goal against Schalke, a gag which resulted in a yellow card for Gabon international Aubameyang. "As someone in charge, I'd have been going crazy," exclaimed Reuter on the German football talk show Doppelpass. "You would have to issue a fine."

> "As someone in charge, I'd have been going crazy. You would have to issue a fine"
>
> Augsburg general-manager Stefan Reuter on Dortmund striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's booking against Schalke

In a spectacular clash of two of the most in-form teams in the Bundesliga, high-flying Wolfsburg once again demonstrated their free-flowing flair and fortitude, coming from behind on three occasions against Werder Bremen to secure a precious 5-3 win at the Weserstadion. Sealing the deal with three goals in five minutes early in the second-half, the Wolves must thank their lucky stars that Dutch striker Bas Dost (see profile, page 48) rarely seems to miss the target these days.

Undefeated in 2015, Wolfsburg would have fancied their chance at Augsburg, who were winless in four, the following week. But football is not an exact science, and while vastly inferior to their visitors in terms of both star names and financial backing, the home side still managed to walk away with all three points. Dominik Kohr was on hand to side-foot home the only goal of the game after Tobias Werner's penalty had been parried by Diego Benaglio. An excellent sixth in the table, Augsburg would qualify for the Europa League if the championship ended in mid-March, but all coach Markus Weinzierl wants to talk about is achieving his aim of avoiding relegation.

By the middle of March, Bayern were 11 points clear at the top of the table. They took another step towards yet another league title with a regulation 4-0 win at Werder Bremen, the Bavarian's sixth straight win.

Striker Robert Lewandowski has played his part in the run of victories and answered his critics in the process. Sections of the German media have taken to wondering out loud if Bayern made a mistake in recruiting the Polish superstar last summer.

Maybe they were taking their cue from Pep Guardiola's recent treatment of the high-profile striker after he played him out of position on the left-wing against Hamburg and then left him out of the starting line-up for the Champions League game in Ukraine versus Shakhtar Donetsk. But fortunately in football there's always an imminent opportunity to return fire on the critics and in the 6-0 away day romp in Paderborn, "Lewa" was in fine form, scoring twice, running cleverly off the ball and linking the play with bravura.

A week later Padorborn went down 2-0 at Borussia Monchengladbach, and they then lost 3-0 at home to Bayer Leverkusen. After watching the Ostwestfalen essentially going through the motions in a 4-0 thumping at Eintracht Frankfurt, it is tempting to conclude that they have already given up the Bundesliga survival ghost.

Boasting only one win since September in a sequence of 15 games, the bell is tolling ever louder and the only consolation is that several other teams in the league – Stuttgart, Freiburg, Hanover and Hamburg – have major deficiencies too. It is tough, however, on Paderborn coach Andre Breitenreiter, who is one of the most gracious, honest and candid characters around. WS

Honest...Breitenreiter's Paderborn look to be on their way down

➤ Cordoba surrender the lead and lose 2-1 at home to Getafe – their seventh consecutive La Liga defeat.

Tuesday *Mar 10*

PORTUGAL: Porto qualify for the last eight of the Champions League for the first time since 2009, beating Basle 4-0 to win 5-1 on aggregate.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo scores twice to become the all-time top scorer in European club competition with 78 goals as Real Madrid lose 4-3 at home to Schalke but squeeze past the Germans and into the quarter-finals of the Champions League, winning 5-4 on aggregate.

Wednesday *Mar 11*

AUSTRALIA: Western Sydney Wanderers move off the bottom of the A-League for the first time this season with a 3-2 win over Melbourne City. Nikita Rukavytsya gets an injury-time winner after Wanderers twice come from behind.
FRANCE: Despite Zlatan Ibrahimovic being sent off, Paris Saint-Germain draw 2-2 in extra time away at Chelsea to go through to the quarter-finals of the Champions League on away goals after a 1-1 draw in their home leg.
GREECE: The Greek Cup quarter-final clash between local rivals AEK Athens and Olympiakos is abandoned following a pitch invasion by a group of AEK supporters moments after the hosts fall behind to an 89th-minute goal by Franco Jara.
PERU: Sporting Cristal spring a major surprise by winning 2-1 away to Argentinian champions Racing in their Libertadores group game thanks to two goals from Carlos Lobaton.
UKRAINE: Oleksandr Kucher receives the quickest red card in Champions League history for a third-minute foul as Shakhtar Donetsk are thrashed 7-0 in Germany by Bayern Munich – who equal their biggest-ever win in the competition.

Success...two-goal Cristal hero Lobaton (centre) battling against Racing

Thursday *Mar 12*

BHUTAN: The lowest team in the FIFA rankings, Bhutan, beat Sri Lanka 1-0 in the World Cup qualifiers with a goal from 19-year-old Tshering Dorji on their competition debut.
FRANCE: Bastia are barred from playing at the Stade Armand Cesari indefinitely following crowd trouble during Saturday's 2-1 derby win against Nice. The Corsican club will now play their Ligue 1 home games behind closed doors and at neutral grounds on mainland France until further notice.
HOLLAND: Ajax suspend three ➤

Trouble...AEK (in yellow) and Olympiakos

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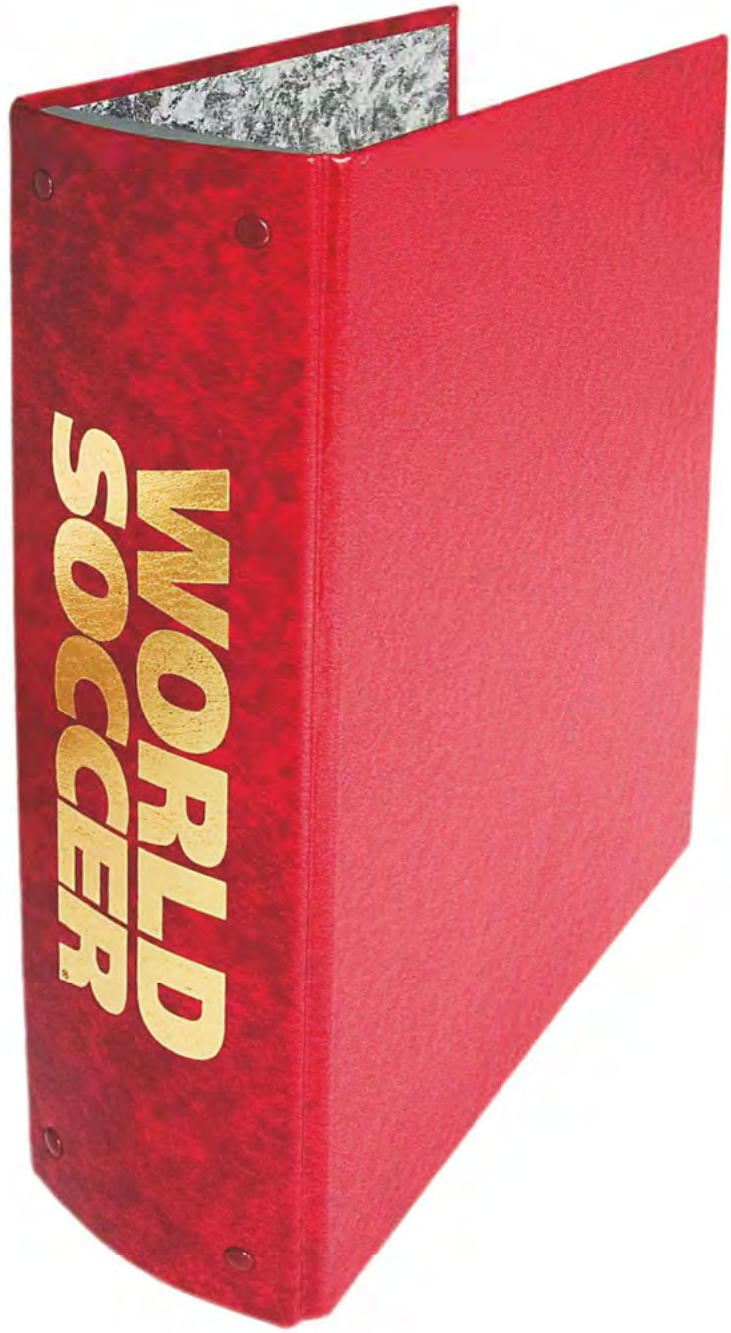

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Denmark

JIM HOLDEN

Olsen to bow out

National coach will leave after Euro 2016

When Morten Olsen announced he would be stepping down as coach of Denmark at the end of the Euro 2016 campaign, the nation was united in respect. Is it any wonder? Here is a football man who won 102 international caps as a player and has led his country for 156 matches as a coach, with a few more still to go.

The double hundred is a singular achievement by a man of high principles and loyal dedication.

As a player Olsen was a wonderful libero; a tall, straight-backed defender with a sharp sense of anticipation and timing, but also a player who was elegant in possession and who could make marvellous runs upfield.

He was captain 50 times, most notably through the fabulous "Danish Dynamite" period when the side reached the Euro 84 semi-finals and dazzled at the 1986 World Cup. Allan Simonsen and Michael Laudrup were more famous and more talented, but the heart of the side was Olsen, a defender booked only once in an international shirt.

> "This is an emotional and delicate decision. I have never seen this job as work – more of a lifestyle. I have always been proud of it."
>
> Morten Olsen

He has been tall and proud as a coach too, standing for questions at press conferences, answering them all, and unafraid to make harsh judgements on key players if he felt it necessary. He did this recently in the case of Christian Eriksen, who admitted that the criticism was warranted.

The players admire and cherish the 65-year-old. He is fond of them too, and deciding to depart was far from easy.

"After 19 years as a player in the red and white, and almost 16 years as the head coach, this is an emotional and delicate decision," said Olsen. "I have never seen this job as work – more of a lifestyle. I have always been proud of it. But I feel good about it and there are two reasons for that.

"I do not want the distraction of people saying, 'is he staying or is he going?' in the build-up to the European Championship. And the DBU [Danish federation] will get more time to find a replacement."

In charge...Olsen directs his players during a friendly against Turkey in September

Danish Dynamite...captain of his country

Possible candidates include Michael Laudrup and Kasper Hjulmand, the boss of German side Mainz, but in truth Olsen is irreplaceable as a man and is a unique figure in Denmark.

Walk into the splendid modern airport in Copenhagen and many of the billboard adverts feature Olsen. He is selling the benefits of hearing aids. That's hard to imagine from any other major figure in football.

Conversation with him has always been a delight. He loves to talk about the game, about his desire for attractive combination play from his team and his fulsome admiration for the style of Barcelona.

He will remind you that Denmark is "just a small country" when the opposition is England or Germany and when failure to qualify for a tournament occurs. Not that

Olsen has done too badly, taking his side to two World Cups and two European Championships, and they are well placed at the moment to reach Euro 2016 and a fitting finale.

That will be 36 years since his international debut in 1970 against Norway at the age of 21, when he was chosen as a right-winger in the days before he switched to defence.

He became national coach in 2000 and has a win ratio of 50 per cent, which is a fine achievement in an era when Denmark have lacked the superstars of the "Dynamite" days.

It is hard to think of Danish football without the commanding figure and influence of Morten Olsen at the helm. When he goes, it will be farewell to a very special figure in the game. WS

➤ youth-team players amid an investigation in to an attack on a female police officer. Forwards Zakaria El Azzouzi, 18, Samet Bulut, 19, and midfielder Ashraf El Mahdioui, 18, are questioned in connection with an incident in which a plain-clothes policewoman sounded her car horn at another vehicle and there was a confrontation.

ITALY: Gonzalo Higuain scores his first-ever European hat-trick as Napoli come from behind to beat Dynamo Moscow 3-1 in the Europa League. In the same competition, Internazionale surrender an early lead to lose 3-1 to Wolfsburg while 10-man Torino lost 2-0 to Zenit. In the all-Italian tie, Fiorentina and Roma draw 1-1.

SPAIN: Vitolo scores the fastest goal in Europa League history, putting Sevilla on their way to a 3-1 victory over Villarreal in just over 13 seconds.

ZIMBABWE: The Zimbabwean FA's failure to pay former coach Jose Claudinei's wages sees the national team expelled from the 2018 World Cup qualifiers. The Brazilian has been owed money since 2008.

Friday *Mar 13*

FRANCE: Drissa Diakite and Giovanni Sio see red as nine-man Bastia lose 3-0 to Monaco.

GERMANY: Joachim Low extends his contract to coach the national team until after the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Bottom of the league Stuttgart lose 4-0 to Bayer Leverkusen, who move up to third in the Bundesliga.

SPAIN: Valencia move temporarily above Atletico Madrid with a 2-0 victory at home to Deportivo La Coruna with goals from Dani Parejo (penalty) and Paco Alcacer.

TURKEY: Kasimpasa coach Shota Arveladze orders his team to let their opponents Konyaspor score a goal after his side go ahead while one of the hosts' players lies injured during their Super Lig clash. Konyaspor go on to win 2-1.

USA: An own goal by goalkeeper Tyler Deric gives Orlando City their first-ever victory in MLS, winning 1-0 against Houston Dynamo.

Saturday *Mar 14*

ARGENTINA: Goals from Cata Diaz and Dani Osvaldo see Boca Juniors beat Defensa y Justicia and go top of the table. Newell's Old Boys climb to third with a 2-1 win at Sarmiento.

Mistake...Houston goalkeeper Deric

ENGLAND: Sunderland crash 4-0 at home to Aston Villa and sit just one point above the relegation zone after Burnley beat second-place Manchester City 1-0 at Turf Moor. Frank Lampard appears as a sub for City and becomes only the second player, after Ryan Giggs, to make 600 Premier League appearances.

GAMBIA: No team from the smallest country on mainland Africa has ever made it to the second round of qualifying in the CAF Champions League, but Real Banjul give themselves a chance with a 1-1 first-leg draw at home to defending champions ES Setif of Algeria.

GERMANY: Robert Lewandowski scores twice as Bayern Munich beat Werder Bremen 4-0 for their sixth successive Bundesliga victory.

ITALY: Parma are docked two points for failing to pay their players. Already bottom of Serie A, they are 16 points from safety, having already been docked a point in December. Zdenek Zeman is denied a win on his return as Cagliari coach after Matias Vecino's goal 37 seconds from time gives Empoli a 1-1 draw. At the top of the table, Juventus win 1-0 at Palermo and move 14 points clear.

PORTUGAL: Benfica go seven points clear at the top of the table with a 2-0 win at home to Braga.

SPAIN: Lionel Messi scores twice as Barcelona open up a four-point lead with a 2-0 victory at Eibar, a game in which Xavi makes his 750th appearance for the Catalan club. Brazilian centre-back Joao Miranda is sent off as Atletico Madrid miss the chance to reclaim third place after being held to a goalless draw at Espanyol.

USA: Ten-man San Jose Earthquakes end their 16-game winless run with a 3-2 victory at the Seattle Sounders.

WALES: The New Saints win a fourth successive Welsh Premier League title with a 3-0 victory over Bala Town. The Saints, who have won the league nine times in 16 seasons, won the League Cup in January and are on course for a domestic treble.

Sunday *Mar 15*

AUSTRALIA: Austrian striker Marc Janko finds the back of the net for an A-League record seventh successive game and ends up with a hat-trick as Sydney beat Brisbane Roar 5-4. Janko has now bettered ➤

➤ Alessandro Del Piero's club record of 14 goals in a season and extends his lead in the golden boot race.
ENGLAND: Diego Costa scores his first Premier League goal for almost two months, but Premier League leaders Chelsea are held to a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge by Southampton, for whom Dusan Tadic equalises from the penalty spot.
FRANCE: Marseille have a late goal ruled out as they draw 0-0 at home to league leaders Lyon in front of a record crowd at the Velodrome. Paris Saint-Germain lose 3-2 to Bordeaux and miss the chance to go top.
GERMANY: A total of 175 supporters are arrested, and 112 police officers injured, during rioting at a fourth division game between Union Berlin reserves and their arch-rivals Dynamo Berlin.
MEXICO: Ronaldinho is dropped by Queretaro after a series of poor performances and media stories of too much partying. New coach Victor Manuel Vucetich, who is a renowned disciplinarian, omitted the 34-year-old Brazilian star after he missed training during the week. A 1-0 defeat at Toluca leaves Queretaro second from bottom in the league with eight points from 10 games. Mexico's under-17 side beat Honduras 3-0 to retain their CONCACAF title. The two finalists qualify for the Under-17 World Cup, along with play-off winners Costa Rica and the USA.

Silverware...Celtic manager Deila

SCOTLAND: Ronny Deila picks up his first trophy since becoming Celtic manager with a 2-0 victory over Dundee United in the Scottish League Cup Final.
SPAIN: Gareth Bale ends a nine-game goalless drought and silences his critics by scoring both goals in Real Madrid's 2-0 victory over Levante,
USA: David Villa gets his first MLS goal as New York City beat New England Revolution 2-0 in their debut game at Yankee Stadium.

Monday *Mar 16*

ARGENTINA: Rosario Central leapfrog Boca Juniors at the top of the Primera Division as Marco Ruben, who is on loan from Dynamo Kiev, scores the only goal in a 1-0 victory over Temperley. Aldosivi win for the first time this season, triumphing 1-0 at 10-man Belgrano.
BRAZIL: It is announced that matches at the 2016 Olympic Games will be played in six cities and seven stadiums, from 3 to 20 August 2016: Belo Horizonte (Mineirao Stadium), Brasilia (Estadio Nacional Mane Garrincha), Manaus (Amazonia Arena), Rio de Janeiro (Maracana and Olympic Stadium), Salvador (Fonte Nova Arena) and Sao Paulo (Corinthians Arena).
DENMARK: Morten Olsen, who has been in charge of the national team for 16 years, says he will step down as Denmark coach after Euro 2016.
ENGLAND: Liverpool, who are at home to Manchester United on Sunday, cut the gap between themselves and fourth-place United to two points with a 1-0 win at Swansea City. Reading will face Arsenal in the FA Cup semi-finals after beating Bradford City 3-0.
ITALY: Lazio win 2-0 away to Torino and move within a point of second-placed city rivals Roma, who go down 2-0 at home to Sampdoria.
PAKISTAN: Tomorrow's World Cup qualifier between Pakistan and Yemen in Lahore is postponed by FIFA due to safety and security concerns.
SPAIN: Real Sociedad collect three points on the road for the first time this season, winning 1-0 at Getafe with a goal from Inigo Martinez.

Denied...Monaco restrict Arsenal to two goals and put them out of the Champions League

Tuesday *Mar 17*

BHUTAN: A 2-1 win against Sri Lanka sees Bhutan book their place in the second round of qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup and 2019 Asian Cup with a 3-1 victory on aggregate.
COSTA RICA: Second-half goals from Esteban Ramirez, Yendrick Ruiz and Jonatan Hansen give Herediano a 3-0 lead over 10-man America in their home leg of the CONCACAF Champions League semi-finals. Michael Arroyo is sent off for the Mexican visitors.
ENGLAND: Arsenal win 2-0 in Monaco but go out of the Champions League at the round-of-16-stage for a fifth successive year, losing on away goals after a 3-3 draw on aggregate.
FRANCE: Nimes will be relegated to the third tier at the end of the season after the club tried to fix matches. The Ligue 2 side were found guilty of attempting to manipulate league matches against Bastia, Dijon, Caen and Creteil-Lusitanos last season.
SPAIN: Fernando Torres scores the winning spot-kick as Atletico Madrid beat Bayer Leverksuen on penalties ➤

Clash...Herediano (in yellow) and America

Guinea-Bissau

STEVE MENARY

Africa's hidden talent

European-based youngsters are key to future success

Guinea-Bissau first entered the African Nations Cup in 1994, after which they either withdrew – or were banned due to withdrawing – from six of the next seven tournaments. And while the West African country has at least entered every World Cup qualifying campaign since France 1998, reaching the finals has always been extremely unlikely.

Yet with the road to Russia 2018 beginning in October for the former Portuguese colony, Manuel Lopes Nascimento, who is president of the country's football federation, hopes this time things will be different.

"We have the best young players in west Africa," says Nascimento, who plans to visit eligible players at clubs ranging from Barcelona, Benfica and Sporting Lisbon to Everton and Liverpool after April's CAF congress in Cairo. "Our problem is not skills, it's infrastructure and investment. The government has an obligation to help. If I can create the right conditions I can get some of them."

Getting that help in a country at the top end of the Fund for Peace's "failed state" ranking is hard. Guinea-Bissau may have succeeded in evading the Ebola epidemic that plagued neighbouring Guinea, but Nascimento's homeland is, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, a major trans-shipment hub for the cocaine trade. But illegal drugs are not the only product flowing out of the country; so too are young footballers.

In 2013, much-travelled English coach Stephen Constantine was invited to Guinea-Bissau with a view to taking the national coach's job. "There is huge potential but it's an absolute mess internally and zero infrastructure," says Constantine, who is now India's coach.

"Most of their players are in Portugal and sent out early doors so they avoid paying the local clubs any money."

Though freed from Portugal's empire in 1974, Guinea-Bissau still has close links. Players are routinely taken to Europe at a young age and re-nationalised. "Benfica and Sporting come to search for players, but that is not our agreement with them," says Nascimento.

Hopeful...Ondame's squad of young players

The future... second-tier side Ondame in training

The story of Edgar Ie and Agostinho Ca is typical. Born in Guinea-Bissau, the pair moved to Europe as teenagers, first joining Sporting Lisbon and then Barcelona in 2012. Though neither has made a senior Barca appearance, both have played junior representative football for Portugal.

That story is replicated with alarming regularity. Other Guinea-Bissauan players to follow the same route range from Maritimo's Danilo Pereira to Amido Balde, who is now playing in Israel after being loaned to Hapoel Tel Aviv by Celtic, and Carlos Mane at Sporting Lisbon.

So too did Francisco Junior and Yalany Baio. Now at Everton and Liverpool respectively, the pair are finding a senior start hard to come by, but at least they are with a major European club.

Some young Guinea-Bissauans, particularly in Portugal, are recruited before they are 16 to make getting a visa easier but then released and abandoned after failing to make the grade.

"I know a few cases of young players who had a rough time at the hands of people who were only interested in their football ability and not so much their social or living conditions," says 36-year-old international defender Bruno Fernandes, who now plays for Welsh Premier League side Cefn Druids.

Along with Junior and Baio, Fernandes is one of a number of Guinea-Bissauan players to congregate in the UK. His brother, Valter, plays for Skelmersdale United in the Northern Premier League, while goalkeeper Germano Mendes is with Vauxhall Motors.

The father figure to these players is Causo Seidi, a coach working with young English football agent Patrick Elsmore Dodsworth to find an alternative to the exploitation of young Guinea-Bissauans.

"It's quite tragic, there's a lot of extracting but not much inward investment. There is no registration," says Elsmore Dodsworth, who was negotiating to buy Guinea-Bissauan second-tier side Ondame and rename it Vida Sports.

He has since changed his approach. With Seidi and Ondame, he wants to bring over a handful of carefully chosen youngsters using funds raised by representing one of the Guinea-Bissauan stars playing in Europe.

Getting visas remains a problem and that approach might sound like another version of exploitation, but Elsmore Dodsworth insists it is not.

"There are a lot of people with good intentions out there, but if you don't have the resources it's pointless," he says. WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

GUINEA-BISSAU is a former Portuguese colony located between Guinea and Senegal

Size: 36,126 sq km
Population: 1.7 million
Capital: Bissau
Languages: Portuguese, Crioulo
Religion: Muslim, indigenous beliefs

➤ to reach the quarter-finals of the Champions League. Trailing 1-0 from the first leg in Germany, Mario Suarez levels the tie at 1-1 to take the game into extra-time and then a shoot-out.

Wednesday *Mar 18*

ARGENTINA: Boca Juniors trail 1-0 at half-time in Venezuela but come back to beat 10-man Zamora 5-1 in the Libertadores Cup. Juan Martinez and Nicolas Colazo both score twice, with Andres Chavez also on target. Luis Vargas is sent off for the hosts. Estudiantes beat Libertad 1-0 to join the Paraguayan side at the top of their group with seven points each.
BULGARIA: Stoycho Mladenov says he will carry on as coach of CSKA Sofia, having resigned on Monday following the weekend's 2-0 loss to Botev Plovdiv. It was a third successive league defeat for CSKA, who are second in the league.
CANADA: Montreal Impact will take a 2-0 advantage to Costa Rica for the second leg of their CONCACAF Champions League semi-final after beating Alajuelense with goals from Ignacio Piatti and Victor Cabrera.
CHINA: Guangzhou Evergrande join Beijing Guoan as the only sides with 100 per cent records in the AFC Champions League after their 4-3 win over Kashima Antlers of Japan.
ITALY: Parma president Giampietro Manenti is arrested for money laundering and embezzlement. He bought the club from Rezart Taci in February but has failed to pay the salaries of players and employees. Carlos Tevez scores twice and sets up a third, for Alvaro Morata, as Juventus beat Borussia Dortmund 3-0 in Germany and progress 5-1 on aggregate in the Champions League.
JAPAN: New national coach Vahid Halilhodzic omits 35-year-old midfielder Yasuhito Endo, who won his 152nd cap earlier this year, from the squad for the upcoming friendlies against Tunisia and Uzbekistan.
MONTENEGRO: Police say they have arrested five players suspected of match fixing. The suspects include players from the top flight and the lower divisions.
RUSSIA: Torpedo Moscow will have to play two home games behind closed doors after supporters racially abused Zenit striker Hulk during Sunday's 1-1 draw. This is Torpedo's third racism-related sanction of the current season.

Delight...Dnipro celebrate beating Ajax

SCOTLAND: Three days after they beat Dundee United in the Scottish League Cup Final, Celtic overcome the same opponents in the quarter-finals of the Scottish Cup, winning the replay 4-0. The pair meet again in the league on Saturday.
SPAIN: Marc-Andre Ter Stegen saves a penalty from Sergio Aguero and Ivan Rakitic scores the only goal of the night as Barcelona beat Manchester City 3-1 on aggregate in the Champions League.

Thursday *Mar 19*

BRAZIL: A last-minute header from Michel Bastos gives Sao Paulo a 1-0 win over Libertadores Cup holders San Lorenzo at the Estadio Morumbi. Champions in 2013, Atletico Mineiro claim their first win of this year's tournament with a 1-0 victory away to Colombia's Santa Fe.
ENGLAND: Louis Van Gaal will quit football when he eventually leaves Manchester United. "This is my last job," he tells *The Daily Telegraph*.
ITALY: Parma are declared bankrupt by an Italian court, but will be allowed to play out the remainder of the season. Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba is ruled out for two months after tearing a hamstring against Dortmund on Wednesday night.
QATAR: FIFA confirm that the Final of the 2022 World Cup will be played on December 18.
UKRAINE: Yevhen Konoplyanka scores in extra-time as Dnipro beat Ajax on away goals after a 2-2 draw on aggregate in the Europa League. Dynamo Kiev overturn a 2-1 first-leg deficit and beat Everton 5-2 in the return at home.

Leader ...Messi

Porto star... Martinez

Pos	NAME		Goals	Factor	Points
1	Lionel Messi	Barcelona	32	2	64
2	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid	30	2	60
3	Alexander Meier	Eintracht Frankfurt	19	2	38
4	Diego Costa	Chelsea	18	2	36
	Evgeni Kabaev	Sillamae Kalev	36	1	36
6	Alexandre Lacazette	Lyon	23	1.5	34.5
7	Sergio Aguero	Manchester City	17	2	34
	Jackson Martinez	Porto	17	2	34
	Neymar	Barcelona	17	2	34
	Arjen Robben	Bayern Munich	17	2	34
11	Andrej Kramaric	HNK Rijeka/Leicester City	21/1	1.5/2	33.5
12	Carlos Bacca	Sevilla	16	2	32
	Harry Kane	Tottenham Hotspur	16	2	32
	Igor Subbotin	Levadia Tallinn	32	1	32
15	Jonatan Soriano	Red Bull Salzburg	21	1.5	31.5
16	Charlie Austin	Queens Park Rangers	15	2	30
	Alberto Bueno	Rayo Vallecano	15	2	30
	Mauro Icardi	Internazionale	15	2	30
	Manucho	Infonet	30	1	30
	Carlos Tevez	Juventus	15	2	30
	Eran Zahavi	Maccabi Tel Aviv	20	1.5	30
22	Antoine Griezmann	Atletico Madrid	14	2	28
	Vladislavs Gutkovskis	Skonto Riga	28	1	28
24	Bas Dost	Wolfsburg	13	2	26

Pos	NAME		Goals	Factor	Points
24	Karim Benzema	Real Madrid	13	2	26
	Gonzalo Higuain	Napoli	13	2	26
	Robert Lewandowski	Bayern Munich	13	2	26
	Jeremy Menez	Milan	13	2	26
	Alexis Sanchez	Arsenal	13	2	26
	Luca Toni	Verona	13	2	26
31	Vidar Orn Kjartansson	Valerenga	25	1	25
	Tarabai	Hibernians	25	1	25
	Chris Venables	Aberystwyth Town	25	1	25
34	Gareth Bale	Real Madrid	12	2	24
	Saido Berahino	West Bromwich Albion	12	2	24
	Robert Beric	Rapid Vienna	16	1.5	24
	Memphis Depay	PSV	16	1.5	24
	Paulo Dybala	Palermo	12	2	24
	Shkelzen Gashi	Basle	16	1.5	24
	Andre-Pierre Gignac	Marseille	16	1.5	24
	Lima	Benfica	12	2	24
	Koka	Rio Ave	12	2	24
	Mario Mandzukic	Atletico Madrid	12	2	24
	Thomas Muller	Bayern Munich	12	2	24
	Jordan Owens	Crusaders	24	1	24
	Franco di Santo	Werder Bremen	12	2	24
	Luciano Vietto	Villarreal	12	2	24

Latest standings at 15.03.15

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

FEBRUARY 2015

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	18 votes
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	16
Gianluigi BUFFON (Juventus)	12
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	9
David OSPINA (Arsenal)	3
Danijel SUBASIC (Monaco)	3
Claudio BRAVO (Barcelona)	2
Iker CASILLAS (Real Madrid)	2
Simon MIGNOLET (Liverpool)	2
ROBERTO (Olympiakos)	2
Sergio ALVAREZ (Celta Vigo)	1
Diego ALVES (Valencia)	1
Fraser FORSTER (Southampton)	1
Jasmin HANDANOVIC (Maribor)	1
Hugo LLORIS (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Anthony LOPES (Lyon)	1
Diego LOPEZ (Milan)	1
Steve MANDANDA (Marseille)	1
Stephane RUFFIER (Saint-Etienne)	1

DEFENDERS

Branislav IVANOVIC (Chelsea)	29
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	21
John TERRY (Chelsea)	15
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	13
PEPE (Real Madrid)	13
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	11
Juan BERNAT (Bayern Munich)	11
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	11
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	10
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	9
NALDO (Wolfsburg)	8
MIRANDA (Atletico Madrid)	7
Jerome BOATENG (Bayern Munich)	6
JUANFRAN (Atletico Madrid)	6
Stephan LICHTSTEINER (Juventus)	6
Jeremy MATHIEU (Barcelona)	6
Ricardo RODRIGUEZ (Wolfsburg)	6
Pablo ZABALETA (Manchester City)	6
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	5
Nathaniel CLYNE (Southampton)	5
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	4
David LUIZ (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Javier MASCHERANO (Barcelona)	4
Nicolas N'KOULOU (Marseille)	4
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Valencia)	4
Kostas MANOLAS (Roma)	3
MAXWELL (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Maxi PEREIRA (Benfica)	3
Martin SKRTEL (Liverpool)	3
Aymen ABDENNOUR (Monaco)	2
Leighton BAINES (Everton)	2
Mehdi BENATIA (Bayern Munich)	2
Gary CAHILL (Chelsea)	2
Dani CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	2
Ashley COLE (Roma)	2
DANILO (Porto)	2
Jose FONTE (Southampton)	2
Jose Luis GAYA (Valencia)	2
Christophe JALLET (Lyon)	2
Nacho MONREAL (Arsenal)	2
Danny ROSE (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Martin STRANZL (Borussia Monchengladbach)	2
Paul VERHAEGH (Augsburg)	2
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (Southampton)	1
Dani ALVES (Barcelona)	1
Jordan AMAVI (Nice)	1
Davide ASTORI (Roma)	1
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	1
Ryan BERTRAND (Southampton)	1
Milan BISEVAC (Lyon)	1
Alex BRUCE (Hull City)	1
Martin CACERES (Juventus)	1
CAICARA (Ludogorets)	1
CARLAO (APOEL)	1
Gael CLICHY (Manchester City)	1
Damien DA SILVA (Caen)	1
Scott DANN (Crystal Palace)	1
Patrice EVRA (Juventus)	1
Rod FANNI (Marseille)	1
Kieran GIBBS (Arsenal)	1
Faouzi GHOULAM (Napoli)	1
Jose GIMENEZ (Atletico Madrid)	1
Camil GLICK (Torino)	1
Raphael GUERREIRO (Lorient)	1
Benedikt HOWEDES (Schalke)	1
Daryl JANMAAT (Newcastle United)	1
Tin JEDVAJ (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
JEFFERSON (Sporting Lisbon)	1
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Manchester City)	1
Laurent KOSCIELNY (Arsenal)	1
Filipe LUIS (Chelsea)	1
MAICON (Roma)	1
Eliaquim MANGALA (Manchester City)	1
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Philippe MEXES (Milan)	1
Alberto MORENO (Liverpool)	1
Fernando NAVARRO (Sevilla)	1
Paulo OLIVEIRA (Sporting Lisbon)	1
Manuel PASQUAL (Fiorentina)	1
RAFINHA (Bayern Munich)	1
Karium REFIK (PSV)	1
Winston REID (West Ham United)	1
Gonzalo RODRIGUEZ (Fiorentina)	1
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Gregory VAN DER WIEL (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1
VIEIRINHA (Wolfsburg)	1
WALLACE (Monaco)	1
WENDELL (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Kurt ZOUMA (Chelsea)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Arjen ROBBEN (Bayern Munich)	39
Cesc FABREGAS (Chelsea)	24
Paul POGBA (Juventus)	22
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Wolfsburg)	13
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	13
Xabi ALONSO (Bayern Munich)	12
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	11
Antoine GRIEZMANN (Atletico Madrid)	10
ISCO (Real Madrid)	10
Mario GOTZE (Bayern Munich)	9
Yaya TOURE (Manchester City)	9
Philipp LAHM (Bayern Munich)	7
Nemanja MATIC (Chelsea)	6
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	5
James RODRIGUEZ (Real Madrid)	5
Radja NAINGGOLAN (Roma)	4
David SILVA (Manchester City)	4
Santi CAZORLA (Arsenal)	3
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Angel DI MARIA (Manchester United)	3
Thomas MULLER (Bayern Munich)	3
NANI (Sporting Lisbon)	3
Dani PAREJO (Valencia)	3
Andrea PIRLO (Juventus)	3
Miralem PJANIC (Roma)	3
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	3
ARDA Turan (Atletico Madrid)	2
Gareth BALE (Real Madrid)	2
Jose Maria CALLEJON (Napoli)	2
Giannelli IMBULA (Marseille)	2
KOKE (Atletico Madrid)	2
Frank LAMPARD (Manchester City)	2
Arturo VIDAL (Juventus)	2
Karim BELLARABI (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	1
Denis CHERYSHEV (Villarreal)	1
GABI (Atletico Madrid)	1
Maxime GONALONS (Lyon)	1
Yoann GOURCUFF (Lyon)	1
Hector HERRERA (Porto)	1
Geoffrey KONDOGBIA (Monaco)	1
Saul NIGUEZ (Atletico Madrid)	1
Pablo PIATTI (Valencia)	1
Franck RIBERY (Bayern Munich)	1
Mohamed SALAH (Fiorentina)	1
Wesley SNEIJDER (Galatasaray)	1
TALISCA (Benfica)	1
Jeremy TOULALAN (Monaco)	1
Granit XHAKA (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1

FORWARDS

Cristiano RONALDO (Real Madrid)	50
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	39
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	20
Diego COSTA (Chelsea)	17
NEYMAR (Barcelona)	14
Bas DOST (Wolfsburg)	12
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	10
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	9
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	8
Alexandre LACAZETTE (Lyon)	8
Carlos TEVEZ (Juventus)	6
Graziano PELLE (Southampton)	5
Alexis SANCHEZ (Arsenal)	5
Francesco TOTTI (Roma)	5
Wayne ROONEY (Manchester United)	3
Luiz ADRIANO (Shakhtar Donetsk)	2
Paulo DYBALA (Palermo)	2
Andre-Pierre GIGNAC (Marseille)	2
Alexander MEIER (Eintracht Frankfurt)	2
Diafra SAKHO (West Ham United)	2
Paco ALCACER (Valencia)	1
Eljero ELIA (Southampton)	1
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	1
Jackson MARTINEZ (Porto)	1
Alberto MORATA (Juventus)	1
Dimitry PAYET (Marseille)	1
Fernando TORRES (Atletico Madrid)	1
Danny WELBECK (Arsenal)	1
Simone ZAZA (Sassuolo)	1

*Philippe Coutinho, Liverpool, also received 5 votes, but Pogba has received more votes during the season.

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Elf* (Holland), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* (Germany), *Goal News* (Greece), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *So Foot* (France), *Sport* (Belgium), *Sport Express* (Russia), *De Telegraaf* (Holland), *TIPSbladet* (Denmark), *World Soccer* (England). More details of votes at **worldsoccer.com/votes**

World Service

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 16)

1st legs

Feb 17
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 1 (Cavani 54)
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Ivanovic 36)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 46,146. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Feb 17
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 0
Bayern Munich (Ger) 0
Att: 34,187. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Sent off: Xabi Alonso (Bayern) 65

Feb 18
Basle (Swi) 1 (Gonzalez 11)
Porto (Por) 1 (Danilo pen 79)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 34,464. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)

Feb 18
Schalke (Ger) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 26, Marcelo 79)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 54,442. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)

Feb 24
Juventus (Ita) 2 (Tevez 13, Morata 43)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 1 (Reus 18)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 41,182. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Feb 24
Manchester City (Eng) 1 (Aguero 69)
Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Suarez 16, 30)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 45,081. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Sent off: Clichy (Man City) 74

Feb 25
Arsenal (Eng) 1 (Oxlade-Chamberlain 90+1)
Monaco (Fra) 3 (Kondogbia 38, Berbatov 53, Ferreira Carrasco 90+4)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 59,868. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Feb 25
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Calhanoglu 57)
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 29,079. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)
Sent off: Tiago (Atletico) 76

2nd legs

Mar 10
Porto 4 (Brahimi 14, Herrera 47, Casemiro 56, Aboubakar 76)
Basle 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 43,108. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Sent off: Samuel (Basle) 90+1
Porto 5-1 on agg

Mar 10
Real Madrid 3 (Cristiano Ronaldo 25, 45, Benzema 53)
Schalke 4 (Fuchs 20, Huntelaar 40, 84, Sane 57)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 69,986. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Real Madrid 5-4 on agg

Mar 11
Bayern Munich 7 (Muller pen 4, 52, Boateng 34, Ribery 49, Badstuber 63, Lewandowski 75, Gotze 87)
Shakhtar Donetsk 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Sent off: Kucher (Shakhtar) 3
Bayern Munich 7-0 on agg

Mar 11
Chelsea 2 (Cahill 81, Hazard pen 96)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (David Luiz 86, Thiago Silva 114)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 37,692.
Ref: Kuipers (Hol)
Sent off: Ibrahimovic (PSG) 31
Agg 3-3; Paris Saint-Germain on away goals

Mar 17
Atletico Madrid 1 (Mario Suarez 27)
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90min:** 1-0. **Att:** 48,273.
Ref: Rizzoli (Ita)
Agg 1-1; Atletico Madrid 3-2 on pens

Mar 17
Monaco 0
Arsenal 2 (Giroud 36, Ramsey 79)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 17,263. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Agg 3-3; Monaco on away goals

Mar 18
Barcelona 1 (Rakitic 31)
Manchester City 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 92,551. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Barcelona 3-1 on agg

Mar 18
Borussia Dortmund 0
Juventus 3 (Tevez 3, 79, Morata 70)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 65,851. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Juventus 5-1 on agg

Quarter-finals draw

Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid (Apr 14 & Apr 22)
Juventus v Monaco (Apr 14 & Apr 22)
Paris Saint-Germain v Barcelona (Apr 15 & Apr 21)
Porto v Bayern Munich (Apr 15 & Apr 21)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 32)

1st legs - Feb 19; 2nd legs - Feb 26
AaB (Den) v Club Brugge (Blg) 1-3, 0-3 (agg 1-6)
Ajax (Hol) v Legia Warsaw (Pol) 1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0)
Anderlecht (Blg) v Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Celtic (Sco) v Internazionale (Ita) 3-3, 0-1 (agg 3-4)
Dnipro (Ukr) v Olympiakos (Gre) 2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2)
Guingamp (Fra) v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)
Liverpool (Eng) v Besiktas (Tur)
1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, Besiktas 5-4 on pens)
PSV Eindhoven (Hol) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Roma (Ita) v Feyenoord (Hol) 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)
Sevilla (Spa) v Monchengladbach (Ger)
1-0, 3-2 (agg 4-2)
Torino (Ita) v Athletic Bilbao (Spa)
2-2, 3-2 (agg 5-4)
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) v Fiorentina (Ita)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Trabzonspor (Tur) v Napoli (Ita) 0-4, 0-1 (agg 0-5)
Villarreal (Spa) v Salzburg (Aut) 2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2)
Wolfsburg (Ger) v Sporting Lisbon (Por)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Young Boys (Swi) v Everton (Eng)
1-4, 1-3 (agg 2-7)

2nd knockout round (last 16)

1st legs - Mar 12; 2nd legs - Mar 19
Club Brugge v Besiktas 2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2)
Dnipro v Ajax 1-0, 1-2 (aet)
(agg 2-2, Dnipro on away goals)
Everton v Dynamo Kiev 2-1, 2-5 (agg 4-6)
Fiorentina v Roma 1-1, 3-0 (agg 4-1)
Napoli v Dynamo Moscow 3-1, 0-0 (agg 3-1)
Villarreal v Sevilla 1-3, 1-2 (agg 2-5)
Wolfsburg v Internazionale 3-1, 2-1 (agg 5-2)
Zenit St Petersburg v Torino 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)

Quarter-finals draw

Club Brugge v Dnipro
Dynamo Kiev v Fiorentina
Sevilla v Zenit St Petersburg
Wolfsburg v Napoli
1st legs - Apr 16; 2nd legs - Apr 23

AFRICA

CAF SUPER CUP

(CAF Champions League holders, ES Setif v Confederation Cup holders, Al Ahly)

Feb 21 - Blida, Algeria
ES Setif (Alg) 1 (Ziaya 70)
Al Ahly (Egy) 1 (Moteab 90+5)
ES Setif 6-5 on pens
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Doue (IvC)
ES Setif: Khedairia - Megateli, Arroussi, Mellouli, Ze Ondo, Zerara, Djahnit (Dagoulou 69), Delhoum, Gasmi (Benyettou 53), Belameiri, Ziaya (Lamri 90).
Al Ahly: Ekramy - Ali, Naguib, Samir, Al Sayed, Trezeguet, Ashour, El Said, Ghaly (Zakaria 60), Soliman (Moteab 76), Abdel Zaher.

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Feb 13-15; 2nd legs - Feb 27-Mar 7
Al Ahli Tripoli (Lby) v Smouha (Egy)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Smouha 5-3 on pens)
Al Hilal (Sud) v KMKM (Zan) 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Al Malakia (SSu) v Kano Pillars (Nga)
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
AS Pikine (Sen) v Etoile Filante (BuF)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Azam (Tan) v Al Merreikh (Sud) 2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3)
Enyimba (Nga) v Buffles du Borgou (Ben)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
Fomboni (Com) v Big Bullets (Mwi)
0-1, 2-2 (agg 2-3)
Gor Mahia (Ken) v CNaPS Sport (Mad)
1-0, 2-3 (agg 3-3, Gor Mahia on away goals)
Kaizer Chiefs (SAf) v Township Rollers (Bot)
2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1)
Kampala City Council (Uga) v Cosmos Bafia (Cam)
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Liga Muculmana (Moz) v APR (Rwa)
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
LLB Academic (Bdi) v Kabuscorp (Ang)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Mangasport (Gab) v Bantu (Les) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Mbabane Swallows (Swa) v Zesco United (Zam)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
MC El Eulma (Alg) v Saint George (Eth)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, MC El Eulma on away goals)
Olympique Bamako (Mli) v Moghreb Tetouan (Mor)
2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3)
Raja Casablanca (Mor) v Diables Noirs (Con)
4-0, 2-2 (agg 6-2)
Real Banjul (Gam) v Barrack Young Controllers (Lbr)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Recreativo do Libolo (Ang) v Sanga Balende (DRC)
3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Sanga Balende on away goals)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v AS Kaloum (Gui)
1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3)
Sony Ela Nguema (EqG) v Semassi (Tog)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
St Michel United (Sey) v Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf)
1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4)
Stade Malien (Mli) v AS GNN (Nig)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Stade Malien on away goals)
USM Alger (Alg) v Foullah Edifice (Chd)
3-0, 1-3 (agg 4-3)

East End Lions (SLe) v Asante Kotoko (Gha) – East End lions withdrew; Asante Kotoko went through

● *Byes to 1st round:* AC Leopards (Con), Al Ahly (Egy), Coton Sport (Cam), CS Sfaxien (Tun), ES Setif (Alg), Esperance (Tun), TP Mazembe (DRC)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Feb 13-15; 2nd legs - Feb 20-Mar 1
Al Ghazal (SSu) v Petrojet (Egy) 0-1, 1-6 (agg 1-7)
Al Ittihad (Lby) v Elect-Sport (Chd) 6-1, 1-0 (agg 7-1)
Al Khartoum (Sud) v Power Dynamos (Zam)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
ASO Chlef (Alg) v Kamboi Eagles (SLe)
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Benfica de Luanda (Ang) v Le Messager Ngozi (Brd)
2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0)
Bidvest Wits (SAf) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
3-0, 0-3 (agg 3-3, Royal Leopards 7-6 on pens)
CF Mounana (Gab) v Polisi (Zan) 5-0, 3-1 (agg 8-1)
Cote d'Or (Sey) v Dedebit (Eth) 2-3, 0-2 (agg 2-5)
Etoile du Congo (Con) v MK Etancheite (DRC)
1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3)
Hearts of Oak (Gha) v AS Police (Ben) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Horoya (Gui) v Fassell (Lbr) 1-0, 3-3 (agg 4-3)
Leones Vegetarianos (EqG) v Dolphins (Nga)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Dolphins 5-3 on pens)
MC Alger (Alg) v Sahel (Nig) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Panthere du Nde (Cam) v Rayon Sports (Rwa)
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Petite Riviere Noire (Mrs) v Ferroviario da Beira (Moz)
1-2, 2-5 (agg 3-7)
RC Bobo (BuF) v Warri Wolves (Nga)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
RS Berkane (Mor) v Onze Createurs (Mli)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Onze Createurs on away goals)
Sofapaka (Ken) v Platinum (Zim) 1-2, 1-2 (agg 2-4)
Togo Port (Tog) v CARA Brazzaville (Con)
2-0, 3-3 (agg 5-3)
Uganda Revenue Authority (Uga) v Elgeco Plus (Mad)
3-2, 1-0 (agg 4-2)
Unisport Bafang (Cam) v Olympique de Ngor (Sen)
1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Volcan (Com) v Petro de Luanda (Ang)
0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)
Young Africans (Tan) v Botswana Defence Force (Bot)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)

● *Byes to 1st round:* Al Ahly Shendi (Sud), AS Vita (DRC), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Club Africain (Tun), Djoliba (Mli), Etoile Sahel (Tun), FUS Rabat (Mor), Orlando Pirates (SAf), Zamalek (Egy)

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

All ties in the preliminary rounds were single leg

1st preliminary round

Feb 4: Johur Darul Ta'zim (Mly) 2 Bengaluru (Ind) 1 (aet); Yadanarbon (Mym) 1 Warriors (Sin) 1 (aet, Warriors 6-5 on pens).

2nd preliminary round

Feb 10: Al Qadsia (Kuw) 1 Al Wehdat (Jor) 0; Al Sadd (Qat) 0 Riffa (Bhr) 0 (aet, Al Sadd 11-10 on pens); Bangkok Glass (Tha) 3 Johur Darul Ta'zim 0; Chonburi (Tha) 4 Kitchee (HK) 1; El Jaish (Qat) 2 Al Nahda (Oma) 1; Guangzhou R&F (Chn) 3 Warriors 0; Ha Noi T&T (Vie) 4 Persib Bandung (Ins) 0.

3rd preliminary round

Feb 17: Al Ahli (Sau) 2 Al Qadsia 1 (aet); Al Wahda (UAE) 4 Al Sadd 4 (aet, Al Sadd 5-4 on pens); Beijing Guoan (Chn) 3 Bangkok Glass 0; Bunyodkor (Uzb) 2 Al Jazira (UAE) 1; Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 1 Guangzhou R&F 3; Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 3 Chonburi 2 (aet); Naft Tehran (Irn) 1 El Jaish 0; Seoul (SKo) 7 Ha Noi T&T 0.

● *Winners qualified for group stage*

AFC CUP

All ties in the preliminary rounds were single leg

1st preliminary round

Feb 9: Ahal (Tkm) 1 Dordoi (Kyr) 0.
Feb 10: Altyn Asyr (Tkm) 0 Al Saqr (Yem) 1; Khayr Vahdat (Taj) 1 Sheikh Russel (Ban) 0.

Hilal Al Quds (Pal) v Manang Marshyangdi (Nep) – Manang Marshyangdi withdrew; Hilal Al Quds went through

2nd preliminary round

Feb 17: Al Hidd (Bhn) 2 Al Saqr 1; Al Jaish (Syr) 0 Hilal Al Quds 0 (aet, Al Jaish 5-4 on pens); Fanja (Oma) 2 Ahal 3; Maziya (Mdv) 1 Ceres (Phi) 0; Salam Zgharta (Leb) 3 Khayr Vahdat 0.

● *Winners qualified for group stage*

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Feb 24-26; 2nd legs - Mar 3-5
Alajuelense (CR) v DC United (USA)
5-2, 1-2 (agg 6-4)
Olimpia (Hnd) v Herediano (CR) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Pachuca (Mex) v Montreal Impact (Can)
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3, Montreal on away goals)
Saprissa (CR) v America (Mex) 0-3, 0-2 (agg 0-5)

OCEANIA

SOLOMON ISLANDS

2014-15 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Western Utd (C)	16	13	1	2	51	13	40
S'mon Warriors	16	12	3	1	47	14	39
Hana	16	9	3	4	20	18	30
Real Kakamora	16	7	4	5	24	24	25
KOSSA	16	6	5	5	29	22	23
Malaita Kingz	16	4	6	6	28	32	18
Koloale	16	3	3	10	22	39	12
Marist Fire	16	2	4	10	20	34	10
X-Beam	16	0	3	13	14	59	3

No relegation from this league

Previous champions (3 most recent)

2011	Koloale
2011-12	Solomon Warriors
2012-13	*Not held*
2013-14	Solomon Warriors

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated

Internationals

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

ASIA
1st round
1st legs

Mar 12 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 3 (Vathanaka 64, 81, Laboravy 90+4)
Macau 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 8,000. **Ref:** Ho (HK)
Cambodia: Sereyroth - Sovan, Srin, Sovannarith (Samoeun 87), Chhoeun, Mony Udom, Suhana (Vathanaka 55), Phallin, Visal, Laboravy, Sokthorn (Sokumpheak 72).
Macau: Ho Man-fai - Amorim, Kong Cheng-hou (Choi Weng-hou 63), Chan Man, Lei Ka-him, Matos, Cheang Cheng-leong, Ho Man-hou, Leong Ka-hang (Ho Chi-fong 78), Niki Torrao, Pang Chi-hang (Lei Chi-kin 89).

Mar 12 - Dili
East Timor 4 (Chiquito 4, 7, Rodrigo 84, Jairo Neto 85)
Mongolia 1 (Erkhembayar 87)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** Pu-udom (Tha)
East Timor: Maxanches - Anggisu, Diogo (Jeca 89), Ramon Saro, Agostinho, Filipe Oliveira, Eusebio, Juninho, Rodrigo, Jose Fonseca (Henrique Cruz 76), Chiquito (Jairo Neto 67).
Mongolia: Ariunbold - Garidmagnai, Enkhjargal, Erkhembayar, Tsedenbal (Ganbold 85), Tsend-Ayush, A Erdenebayar (Tsolmon 70), Tuguldur, Bilguun, Ganbaatar (Gal-Erdene 60), Naranbold.

Mar 12 - Guwahati
India 2 (Chhetri 53, 71)
Nepal 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 11,200. **Ref:** Asimov (Uzb)
India: Paul - Dey, Mondal, Kotal, Jhingan, Rodrigues (Lobo 75), Ralte (J Singh 61), F Fernandes, Lyngdoh, Chhetri, R Singh (Narzary 90+2).
Nepal: Chemjong - Maharjan, S Rai, Chand, S Thapa, Rabin Shrestha, Silwal, J Shrestha (Bista 63), B Lama, Khawas (Shahukhala 87), Magar.

Mar 12 - Colombo
Sri Lanka 0
Bhutan 1 (Tshering Dorji 83)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,500. **Ref:** Fu (Chn)
Sri Lanka: Perera - S Bandara, Eranga, Madushan, Roshan, S Kumara (N Bandara 60), De Silva (Fazal 75), Rifnas, Sanjeev (Zarwan 60), Ishan, Sanjeewa.
Bhutan: H Gurung - D Gyeltshen, M Gurung, J Dorji, Nidup, Tshering, Tshering Dorji, U Dorji (K Gurung 71), Basnet (Dawa 64), C Gyeltshen, L Dorji.

Mar 12 - Kaohsiung
Taiwan 0
Brunei 1 (A Said 36)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,273. **Ref:** Arumughan (Ind)
Taiwan: Chiu Yu-hung - Chen Yi-wei, Lee Jian-liang, Wang Ruei, Chen Po-liang, Chen Hao-wei, Victor Chou (Lin Chang-lun 52), Wen Chih-hao, Chen Ting-yang, Ko Yu-ting (Lo Chih-en 56), Li Mao (Wu Chun-ching 70).
Brunei: Yussof - Zahari, Petara, Mu'iz Sisa, Hanif Amir (Akup 90+3), Salleh, Fakharazzi, Othman, Azwan Ali Rahman (Abdul Ali Rahman 75), S Said (Hamzah 58), A Said.

Mar 12 - Doha, Qatar
Yemen 3 (Al Matari 3, Boqshan 56, Al Sasi 69)
Pakistan 1 (Bashir pen 67)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 300. **Ref:** Abu Loum (Jor)
Yemen: Ayash - Al Jarshi, Al Radaei (Al Zubairi 71), Boqshan, Qaid, Al Hifi, Al Omaisi (Al Sasi 57), Al Khyat (Al Ghamri 84), Al Hagri, Al Gabr, Al Matari.
Pakistan: M Hussain - Aslam, Ahsan Ullah, Bilal, Mohsin Ali (Asif 63), M Ahmed (Mehmood Khan 38), S Hussain, Riaz, Bashir, K Ullah, Muhammad Ali (Adil 53).

2nd legs

Mar 17 - Thimphu
Bhutan 2 (C Gyeltshen 5, 90)
Sri Lanka 1 (Zarwan 35)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Al Awaji (Sau)
Bhutan 3-1 on agg
Bhutan: H Gurung - D Gyeltshen (C Dorji 69), M Gurung, J Dorji, Nidup, Tshering, Tshering Dorji, U Dorji, Basnet, C Gyeltshen (Subba 90+1), L Dorji (Dawa 78).
Sri Lanka: Perera - S Bandara (Fazal 82), Eranga, Madushan, Roshan, S Kumara (De Silva 71), Rifnas (Sanjeev 71), Zarwan, Ishan, N Bandara, Sanjeewa.

Mar 17 - Bandar Seri Begawan
Brunei 0
Taiwan 2 (Wang Ruei 37, Chu En-le 53)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Al Khudhayr (Sau)
Taiwan 2-1 on agg
Brunei: Yussof - Hamzah (Baqi 53), Zahari, Petara, Mu'iz Sisa, Hanif Amir (Akup 66), Salleh, Fakharazzi (Abdul Ali Rahman 21), Othman, S Said, A Said.
Taiwan: Lu Kun-chi - Chen Yi-wei (Chen Wei-chuan 84), Lee Jian-liang, Wang Ruei, Chen Po-liang, Lin Chang-lun (Victor Chou 73), Chen Hao-wei, Wen Chih-hao (Chen Chao-an 90+1), Chu En-le, Chen Ting-yang, Lo Chih-en.

Mar 17 - Macau
Macau 1 (Leong Ka-hang pen 52)
Cambodia 1 (Bin 28)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Abdul Baki (Oma)
Cambodia 4-1 on agg
Macau: Ho Man-fai - Amorim, Kong Cheng-hou (Ho Chi-fong 59), Chan Man, Lei Ka-him, Matos, Cheang Cheng-leong, Ho Man-hou, Leong Ka-hang (Sio Ka-un 81), Niki Torrao, Pang Chi-hang (Lao Pak-kin 87).
Cambodia: Sereyroth - Sovan, Bin, Srin, Sovannarith (Samoeun 46), Chhoeun, Mony Udom (Vathanaka 62), Suhana, Visal, Laboravy, Sokthorn (Phallin 80).

Mar 17 - Ulaan Baatar
Mongolia 0
East Timor 1 (Patrick 9)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Wang Di (Chn)
East Timor 5-1 on agg
Mongolia: Ariunbold - Garidmagnai, Enkhjargal, Erkhembayar (Togsbileg 72), Tsend-Ayush, Tuguldur (Daginaa 72), Bilguun, Murun, Gal-Erdene, Tsolmon (Tsedenbal 61), Naranbold.
East Timor: Maxanches - Anggisu, Diogo, Ramon Saro, Agostinho, Filipe Oliveira, Eusebio (Jose Fonseca 70), Juninho, Rodrigo, Patrick (Nataniel Reis 90+1), Jairo Neto (Chiquito 89).

Mar 17 - Kathmandu
Nepal 0
India 0
Att: 10,500. **Ref:** K Al Marri (Qat)
India 2-0 on agg
Nepal: Chemjong - Maharjan, S Rai, Chand, S Thapa, Rabin Shrestha, Silwal (Bista 67), B Lama, Shahukhala (A Gurung 57), Khawas (J Rai 84), Magar.
India: Paul - Dey, Mondal, Kotal, Jhingan, Rodrigues (Lobo 46), Ralte, F Fernandes (J Singh 73), Lyngdoh (Ganesh 87), Chhetri, R Singh.

● *Pakistan v Yemen was scheduled for Mar 17 in Lahore but postponed after bombings in the city*

FRIENDLIES

Saturday, February 14
Feb 14 - Antalya, Turkey
Romania 2 (Popa 21, Lazar 87)
Moldova 1 (Carp 9)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vilkov (Rus)
Romania: Lung - Manea, Papp, Muth, Vatajelu, Prepelita (Anton 75), Pintilii, Popa (Hora 66), Rusescu (Roman 75), Bumba (Lazar 66), Keseru (Budescu 90).
Moldova: Calancea - Burghiu, Posmac, Racu, Jardan (Gheorghiev 46), Erhan (Antoniuc 46), Cojocari (Cheptine 46), Rata (Onica 46), Carp (Patras 46), Dedov (Picusciac 46), Boghiu (Leuca 46).

Wednesday, February 18
Feb 18 - Antalya, Turkey
Moldova 1 (Gatcan 54)
Kazakhstan 1 (Shchetkin 48)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Nikolaev (Rus)
Moldova: Cebanu - Racu, Posmac, Golovatenco, Jardan, Erhan, Onica (Rata 57), Gatcan (Patras 84), Picusciac (Boghiu 46), Cheptine (Cojocari 57), Sidorenco (Dedov 57).
Kazakhstan: Erich - Shchetkin, Logvinenko, Abdulin (Malyi 46), Vorotnikov, Darabaev, Aliyev, Suyumbaev (Shomko 46), Nurgaliyev (Kozhamberdy 74), Smakov (Bogdanov 53), Konysbaev (Islamkhan 46).

Friday, March 6
Mar 6 - Bridgetown
Barbados 3 (Headley 16, Jamal Chandler 21, J Harewood 64)
St Vincent & The Grenadines 1 (Cunningham 86)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Martindale (Bar)
Barbados: Weir (Field 71) - Morris, Bailey, Mottley, Brown, Gibson (J Harewood 58), Hunte (Mayers 65), Headley (Holligan 59), R Harewood (Hill 71), Jamal Chandler, Jabarry Chandler (Stewart 67).
St Vincent & The Grenadines: W McDowall - J McDowall, Richardson, Lowman, Ashton (Solomon 78), McBurnette (Cunningham 28), Hamlet, E George, Anderson (Slater 63), Thomas (Prescott 46), M Samuel. *Sent off: Richardson 8, M Samuel 40, Lowman 67.*

Mar 6 - Hamilton
Bermuda 2 (Simons 22, Raynor 45)
Grenada 2 (J Rennie 20, R Phillip 77)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 600. **Ref:** Salazar (USA)
Bermuda: Bell - White (Ming 81), Hayward, Hill, Webb, Raynor (Robinson 68), Manders, Lewis, Brangman, Simons (Russell 81), Donawa (Harvey 58). *Sent off: Webb 51.*
Grenada: Belfon - St John, Marshall, S Phillip, Langaigne, W Rennie (Cuffie 60), S Rennie (Smith 81), J Rennie (Graneau 86), M Phillip, Bain, James (R Phillip 72).

Sunday, March 8
Mar 8 - St John's
Antigua & Barbuda 2 (Javorn Stevens 24, T Thomas 53)
US Virgin Islands 0
HT: 1-0
Antigua & Barbuda: James - A Thomas, Jamoy Stevens, J Harriette, Kirwan, Jamal Stevens, T Thomas, Burton, Robinson, Henry, Javorn Stevens.

Mar 8 - Bridgetown
Barbados 2 (Holligan 12, R Harewood 17)
St Vincent & The Grenadines 2 (Gilkes 3, Slater 86)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Taylor (Bar)
Barbados: Weir - Morris, Bailey, Mottley (Jamal Chandler 71), Brown, Harris (Manning 90), Hunte (Mayers 60), Sargeant (Headley 59), Holligan (Boyce 87), R Harewood (J Harewood 66), Harte.
St Vincent & The Grenadines: Christopher - Ashton, Solomon (McBurnette 79), Dennie, J McDowall, Gilkes (Anderson 65), Jeffers (E George 64), Hamlet (Hoyte 30), Cunningham (Edwards 79), Slater, Prescott.

Mar 8 - Hamilton
Bermuda 2 (Russell 13, Castle 90)
Grenada 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Penso (USA)
Bermuda: Dill - T Burgess, Leverock, Bather, Harvey, Bascome (Hill 78), Ming, Simmons (Robinson 46), Lewis (Swan 86), Warren (Castle 53), Russell (Simons 53).
Grenada: Belfon - St John, Mark (Smith 74), S Phillip, Langaigne, Cuffie, J Rennie, S Rennie, M Phillip (W Rennie 35), Bain (R Phillip 87), James (Graneau 76).

Sunday, March 15
Mar 15 - St John's
Antigua & Barbuda 1 (T Thomas 32)
Dominica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 250. **Ref:** Robinson (StL)
Antigua & Barbuda: James - A Thomas, Jamoy Stevens, J Harriette, Daniel, T Thomas, Burton, Robinson, T Harriette, Smith, Javorn Stevens.
Dominica: G Prince - McKenzie, Joseph, A Lawrence, J Prince, Bertrand, Thomas, H Prince, Lockhart, Elizee, Peltier.

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USA MLS 2015

CHICAGO FIRE

GOALKEEPERS
18 Jon **BUSCH** (38) 18.08.76
1 Alec **KANN** (24) 08.08.90
25 Sean **JOHNSON** (25) 31.05.89

DEFENDERS
4 **ADAILTON** (Bra) (31) 16.04.83
16 Greg **COCHRANE** (24) 01.11.90
22 Patrick **DOODY** (22) 22.04.92
6 Eric **GEHRIG** (27) 15.12.87
3 Joevin **JONES** (T&T) (23) 03.08.91
20 Jeff **LARENTOWICZ** (31) 05.08.83
5 Lovel **PALMER** (Jam) (30) 30.08.84
2 Matt **POLSTER** (21) 08.06.93

MIDFIELDERS
7 **ALEX** (Bra) (26) 15.12.88
30 Razvan **COCIS** (Rom) (32) 19.02.83
17 Collin **FERNANDEZ** (18) 13.02.97
10 Shaun **MALONEY** (Sco) (32) 24.01.83
21 Chris **RITTER** (24) 29.10.90
19 Harry **SHIPP** (23) 07.11.91
26 Michael **STEPHENS** (25) 03.04.89
8 Matt **WATSON** (Eng) (30) 01.01.85

FORWARDS
11 David **ACCAM** (Gha) (24) 28.09.90
24 Quincy **AMARIKWA** (27) 29.12.87
23 Guly **DO PRADO** (Bra) (33) 31.12.81
77 Kennedy **IGBOANANIKE** (Nga) (26) 26.02.89
9 Mike **MAGEE** (30) 02.09.84
14 Patrick **NYARKO** (Gha) (29) 15.01.86

COACH
Frank **YALLOP** (Can) (50) 04.04.64

COLORADO RAPIDS

GOALKEEPERS
12 John **BERNER** (24) 14.02.91
1 Clint **IRWIN** (25) 01.04.89
18 Zac **MacMATH** (23) 07.08.91

DEFENDERS
4 Marc **BURCH** (30) 07.05.84
23 Bobby **BURLING** (30) 15.10.84
5 Michael **HARRINGTON** (29) 24.01.86
3 Drew **MOOR** (31) 15.01.84
27 Shane **O'NEILL** (21) 02.09.93
16 James **RILEY** (32) 27.10.82
44 Axel **SJOBERG** (Swe) (23) 08.03.91
33 Jared **WATTS** (23) 03.02.92

MIDFIELDERS
57 Carlos **ALVAREZ** (24) 12.11.90
6 Sam **CRONIN** (28) 12.12.86
94 Marlon **HAIRSTON** (20) 23.03.94
2 Nick **LABROCCA** (30) 04.12.84
22 Lucas **PITTINARI** (Arg) (23) 30.11.91
8 Dillon **POWERS** (24) 14.02.91
15 Juan **RAMIREZ** (Arg) (21) 25.05.93
11 Marcelo **SARVAS** (Bra) (33) 16.10.81
17 Dillon **SERNA** (20) 25.03.94

FORWARDS
14 Dominique **BADJI** (Sen) (22) 16.10.92
26 Deshorn **BROWN** (Jam) (24) 22.12.90
29 Caleb **CALVERT** (18) 22.10.96
19 Charles **ELOUNDOU** (Cam) (20) 04.12.94
7 Vicente **SANCHEZ** (Uru) (35) 07.12.79
10 Gabriel **TORRES** (Pan) (26) 31.10.88

COACH
Pablo **MASTROENI** (38) 29.08.76

COLUMBUS CREW

GOALKEEPERS
1 Steve **CLARK** (28) 14.04.86
28 Matt **LAMPSON** (25) 06.09.89
41 Brad **STUVER** (23) 16.04.91

DEFENDERS
21 Chad **BARSON** (24) 25.02.91
24 Sergio **CAMPBELL** (Jam) (23) 16.01.92
14 Waylon **FRANCIS** (CR) (24) 20.09.90
27 Hernan **GRANA** (Arg) (29) 12.04.85
3 Chris **KLUTE** (25) 05.03.90
4 Michael **PARKHURST** (31) 24.01.84
5 Emanuel **POGATETZ** (Aut) (32) 16.01.83
22 Kalen **RYDEN** (23) 12.04.91
2 Tyson **WAHL** (31) 23.02.84

MIDFIELDERS
13 Ethan **FINLAY** (24) 06.08.90
19 Romain **GALL** (20) 31.01.95
12 Kevan **GEORGE** (T&T) (25) 30.01.90
10 Federico **HIGUAIN** (Arg) (30) 25.10.84
16 Hector **JIMENEZ** (26) 03.11.88
9 Justin **MERAM** (Irq) (26) 04.12.88
8 Mohammed **SAEID** (Swe) (24) 24.12.90
17 Ben **SPEAS** (24) 17.01.91
7 Kristinn **STEINDORSSON** (Ice) (24) 29.04.90
26 Ben **SWANSON** (17) 18.07.97
6 Tony **TCHANI** (Cam) (25) 13.04.89
20 Wil **TRAPP** (22) 15.01.93

FORWARDS
29 Adam **BEDELL** (23) 01.12.91
23 Kei **KAMARA** (SLe) (30) 01.09.84
25 Sagi **LEV-ARI** (Isr) (25) 04.07.89
18 Aaron **SCHOENFELD** (24) 17.04.90

COACH
Gregg **BERHALTER** (41) 01.08.73

DALLAS

GOALKEEPERS
44 Jesse **GONZALEZ** (Mex) (19) 25.05.95
1 Dan **KENNEDY** (32) 22.07.82
18 Chris **SEITZ** (27) 12.03.87

DEFENDERS
33 Otis **EARLE** (Eng) (23) 17.01.92
24 Matt **HEDGES** (24) 01.04.90
3 Moises **HERNANDEZ** (23) 05.03.92
22 Stephen **KEEL** (31) 11.04.83
17 Zach **LOYD** (27) 18.07.87
25 Walker **ZIMMERMAN** (21) 19.05.93

MIDFIELDERS
23 Kellyn **ACOSTA** (19) 24.07.95
21 Michael **BARRIOS** (Col) (23) 21.04.91
4 Kyle **BEKKER** (Can) (24) 02.09.90
10 Mauro **DIAZ** (Arg) (23) 10.03.91
26 Danny **GARCIA** (21) 14.10.93
14 Atiba **HARRIS** (StK) (30) 09.01.85
12 Ryan **HOLLINGSHEAD** (23) 16.04.91
31 **MICHEL** (Bra) (33) 09.06.81
8 Victor **ULLOA** (23) 04.03.92
29 Alejandro **ZENDEJAS** (17) 07.02.98

FORWARDS
13 Tesho **AKINDELE** (22) 31.03.92
11 Fabian **CASTILLO** (Col) (22) 17.06.92
16 Coy **CRAFT** (17) 23.05.97
7 Blas **PEREZ** (Pan) (33) 13.03.81
9 David **TEXEIRA** (Uru) (24) 27.02.91

COACH
Oscar **PAREJA** (Col) (46) 10.08.68

DC UNITED

GOALKEEPERS
50 Andrew **DYKSTRA** (29) 02.01.86
28 Bill **HAMID** (24) 25.11.90
- Travis **WORRA** (21) 09.04.93

DEFENDERS
15 Steve **BIRNBAUM** (24) 23.01.91
32 Bobby **BOSWELL** (31) 15.03.83
5 Sean **FRANKLIN** (29) 21.03.85
2 Taylor **KEMP** (24) 23.07.90
22 Chris **KORB** (27) 08.10.87
6 Kofi **OPARE** (24) 12.10.90
20 Jalen **ROBINSON** (20) 08.05.94

MIDFIELDERS
17 Miguel **AGUILAR** (Mex) (21) 30.08.93
8 Davy **ARNAUD** (34) 22.06.80
14 Nick **DeLEON** (24) 17.07.90
12 Michael **FARFAN** (26) 23.06.88
4 Markus **HALSTI** (Fin) (30) 19.03.84
25 Jared **JEFFREY** (24) 14.06.90
23 Perry **KITCHEN** (23) 29.02.92
27 Collin **MARTIN** (20) 09.11.94
- Dan **METZGER** (21) 06.08.93
11 Luis **SILVA** (26) 10.12.88

FORWARDS
19 Jairo **ARRIETA** (CR) (31) 25.08.83
30 Conor **DOYLE** (23) 13.10.91
10 Fabian **ESPINDOLA** (Arg) (29) 04.05.85
7 Eddie **JOHNSON** (30) 31.03.84
13 Chris **PONTIUS** (27) 12.05.87
18 Chris **ROLFE** (32) 17.01.83
29 Michael **SEATON** (Jam) (18) 01.05.96

COACH
Ben **OLSEN** (37) 03.05.77

NEW YORK RED BULLS

GOALKEEPERS
24 Santiago **CASTANO** (19) 14.04.95
18 Kyle **REYNISH** (31) 03.11.83
31 Luis **ROBLES** (30) 11.05.84

DEFENDERS
25 Chris **DUVALL** (23) 10.09.91
35 Andrew **JEAN-BAPTISTE** (22) 16.06.92
5 Connor **LADE** (25) 16.11.89
3 Shawn **McLAWS** (21) 09.03.93
20 Matt **MIAZGA** (19) 19.07.95
7 Roy **MILLER** (CR) (30) 24.11.84
22 Karl **OUIMETTE** (Can) (22) 18.06.92
55 Damien **PERRINELLE** (Fra) (31) 12.09.83
23 Ronald **ZUBAR** (Fra) (29) 20.09.85

MIDFIELDERS
21 Ruben **BOVER** (Spa) (22) 24.06.92
4 Michael **BUSTAMANTE** (Col) (25) 21.09.89
27 Sean **DAVIS** (22) 08.02.93
16 Sacha **KLJESTAN** (29) 09.09.85
8 Felipe **MARTINS** (Bra) (24) 30.09.90
11 Dax **McCARTY** (27) 30.04.87
91 Dane **RICHARDS** (Jam) (31) 14.12.83
10 Lloyd **SAM** (Eng) (30) 27.09.84
17 Manolo **SANCHEZ** (23) 10.11.91
19 Leo **STOLZ** (Ger) (24) 15.02.91
15 Sal **ZIZZO** (27) 03.04.87

FORWARDS
9 Anatole **ABANG** (Cam) (18) 06.07.96
13 Mike **GRELLA** (28) 23.01.87
- Peguy **LUYINDULA** (Fra) (35) 25.05.79
99 Bradley **WRIGHT-PHILLIPS** (Eng) (29) 12.03.85

COACH
Jesse **MARSCH** (41) 08.11.73

ORLANDO CITY

GOALKEEPERS
42 Josh **FORD** (27) 06.11.87
22 Tally **HALL** (29) 12.05.85
1 Donovan **RICKETTS** (Jam) (37) 07.05.77

DEFENDERS
14 Luke **BODEN** (Eng) (26) 26.11.88
78 Aurelien **COLLIN** (Fra) (28) 08.03.86
23 Conor **DONOVAN** (19) 08.01.96
3 Seb **HINES** (Eng) (26) 29.05.88
27 Rafael **RAMOS** (Por) (20) 09.01.95
29 Tommy **REDDING** (18) 24.01.97
4 Sean **ST LEDGER** (Rol) (30) 28.12.84
2 Tyler **TURNER** (19) 04.03.96

MIDFELDERS
12 Eric **AVILA** (27) 24.11.87
6 Tony **CASCIO** (24) 28.03.90
17 Darwin **CEREN** (EIS) (25) 31.12.89
55 **ESTRELA** (Por) (19) 22.09.95
8 Harrison **HEATH** (Eng) (18) 16.04.96
7 Cristian **HIGUITA** (Col) (21) 14.01.94
10 **KAKA** (Bra) (32) 22.04.82
18 Kevin **MOLINO** (T&T) (24) 17.06.90
24 Lewis **NEAL** (Eng) (33) 14.07.81
5 Amobi **OKUGO** (23) 13.03.91
15 Pedro **RIBEIRO** (Bra) (24) 13.06.90
20 Brek **SHEA** (25) 28.02.90

FORWARDS
21 Cyle **LARIN** (Can) (19) 17.04.95
19 Danny **MWANGA** (DRC) (23) 17.07.91
9 Martin **PATERSON** (NI) (27) 10.05.87
11 Carlos **RIVAS** (Col) (20) 15.04.94
35 Bryan **ROCHEZ** (Hon) (20) 01.01.95

COACH
Adrian **HEATH** (Eng) (54) 11.01.61

PHILADELPHIA UNION

GOALKEEPERS
1 Andre **BLAKE** (Jam) (24) 21.11.90
92 Rais **M'BOLHI** (Alg) (28) 25.04.86
55 John **McCARTHY** (22) 07.04.92

DEFENDERS
33 **FABINHO** (Bra) (29) 16.03.85
28 Ray **GADDIS** (25) 13.01.90
16 Richie **MARQUEZ** (22) 26.05.92
23 Steven **VITORIA** (Por) (28) 11.01.87
15 Ethan **WHITE** (24) 01.01.91
25 Sheanon **WILLIAMS** (24) 17.03.90

MIDFIELDERS
7 Brian **CARROLL** (33) 20.07.81
44 Daniel **CRUZ** (25) 03.01.90
8 Maurice **EDU** (28) 18.04.86
77 **FRED** (Bra) (35) 18.08.79
13 Michael **LAHOUD** (SLe) (28) 15.09.86
10 Cristian **MAIDANA** (Arg) (28) 24.01.87
20 Jimmy **McLAUGHLIN** (21) 30.04.93
5 Vincent **NOGUEIRA** (Fra) (27) 16.01.88
27 Zach **PFEFFER** (20) 06.01.95

FORWARDS
18 Fernando **ARISTEGUIETA** (Ven) (22) 09.04.92
6 Conor **CASEY** (33) 25.07.81
19 Dzenan **CATIC** (Bos) (22) 25.05.92
29 Antoine **HOPPENOT** (24) 23.11.90
17 CJ **SAPONG** (26) 27.12.88
9 Sebastien **LE TOUX** (Fra) (31) 10.01.84
11 Andrew **WENGER** (24) 25.12.90

COACH
Jim **CURTIN** (35) 23.06.79

PORTLAND TIMBERS

GOALKEEPERS
90 Jake **GLEESON** (NZ) (24) 26.06.90
12 Adam **KWARASEY** (Gha) (27) 12.12.87
33 Andrew **WEBER** (31) 09.08.83

DEFENDERS
7 Nat **BORCHERS** (33) 13.04.81
15 **JEANDERSON** (Bra) (23) 13.08.91
13 Jack **JEWSBURY** (33) 13.04.81
35 Anthony **MANNING** (22) 04.09.92
23 Norberto **PAPARATTO** (Arg) (31) 03.01.84
20 Taylor **PEAY** (23) 05.09.91
2 Alvas **POWELL** (Jam) (20) 18.07.94
24 Liam **RIDGEWELL** (Eng) (30) 21.07.84
19 Jorge **VILLAFANA** (25) 16.09.89

MIDFIELDERS
27 Nick **BESLER** (21) 07.05.93
21 Diego **CHARA** (Col) (28) 05.04.86
26 George **FOCHIVE** (22) 24.03.92
4 Will **JOHNSON** (Can) (28) 21.01.87
6 Darlington **NAGBE** (Lbr) (24) 19.07.90
17 Michael **NANCHOFF** (26) 24.09.88
28 Andy **THOMA** (21) 29.04.93
8 Diego **VALERI** (Arg) (28) 01.05.86
14 Ben **ZEMANSKI** (26) 12.05.88

FORWARDS
9 Fanendo **ADI** (Nga) (24) 10.10.90
11 Dairon **ASPRILLA** (Col) (22) 25.05.92
10 Gaston **FERNANDEZ** (Arg) (31) 12.10.83
32 Schillo **TSHUMA** (Zim) (22) 21.09.92
37 Maximiliano **URRUTI** (Arg) (24) 22.02.91
22 Rodney **WALLACE** (CR) (26) 17.06.88

COACH
Caleb **PORTER** (40) 18.02.75

REAL SALT LAKE

GOALKEEPERS
24 Jeff **ATTINELLA** (26) 29.09.88
1 Lalo **FERNANDEZ** (Mex) (22) 16.12.92
18 Nick **RIMANDO** (35) 17.06.79

DEFENDERS
2 Tony **BELTRAN** (27) 11.10.87
14 Justen **GLAD** (18) 28.02.97
3 Phanuel **KAVITA** (DRC) (21) 09.03.93
29 Abdoulie **MANSALLY** (Gam) (26) 27.01.89
21 Aaron **MAUND** (24) 19.09.90
6 Boyd **OKWUONU** (22) 24.02.93
4 Jamison **OLAVE** (Col) (33) 21.04.81
17 Demar **PHILLIPS** (Jam) (31) 23.09.83
28 Chris **SCHULER** (27) 06.09.87
12 Elias **VASQUEZ** (Gua) (22) 18.06.92

MIDFIELDERS
7 Jordan **ALLEN** (19) 25.04.95
5 Kyle **BECKERMAN** (32) 23.04.82
10 Luis **GIL** (21) 14.11.93
11 Javier **MORALES** (Arg) (35) 10.01.80
19 Luke **MULHOLLAND** (Eng) (26) 07.08.88
16 **PECKA** (Bra) (25) 02.05.89
50 Sebastian **SAUCEDO** (18) 22.01.97
27 John **STERTZER** (24) 04.10.90

FORWARDS
13 Olmes **GARCIA** (Col) (22) 21.10.92
23 Sebastian **JAIME** (Arg) (28) 30.01.87
8 Joao **PLATA** (Ecu) (23) 01.03.92
15 Alvaro **SABORIO** (CR) (32) 25.03.82
49 Devon **SANDOVAL** (23) 16.06.91

COACH
Jeff **CASSAR** (41) 02.02.74

(ages as of 06.03.15)

HOUSTON DYNAMO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Tyler **DERIC** (26) 30.08.88
30 Michael **LISCH** (24) 30.08.90
31 Joe **WILLIS** (26) 10.08.88

DEFENDERS
26 Corey **ASHE** (28) 14.03.86
19 Oumar **BALLO** (Mli) (23) 02.04.91
7 DaMarcus **BEASLEY** (32) 24.05.82
16 AJ **COCHRAN** (22) 09.02.93
18 David **HORST** (29) 25.10.85
23 Taylor **HUNTER** (21) 07.07.93
5 Raul **RODRIGUEZ** (Spa) (27) 22.09.87
2 Kofi **SARKODIE** (23) 22.03.91
4 Jermaine **TAYLOR** (Jam) (30) 14.01.85

MIDFIELDERS
13 Ricardo **CLARK** (32) 10.02.83
11 Brad **DAVIS** (33) 08.11.81
27 Oscar Boniek **GARCIA** (Hon) (30) 04.09.84
8 Luis **GARRIDO** (Hon) (24) 05.11.90
15 Alexander **LOPEZ** (Hon) (22) 05.06.92
33 Leonel **MIRANDA** (Arg) (21) 07.01.94
28 Memo **RODRIGUEZ** (19) 27.12.95
21 Zach **STEINBERGER** (22) 10.05.92
6 Nathan **STURGIS** (27) 06.07.87

FORWARDS
10 Giles **BARNES** (Eng) (26) 05.08.88
12 Will **BRUIN** (25) 24.10.89
17 Chandler **HOFFMAN** (24) 17.08.90
14 Jason **JOHNSON** (Jam) (24) 09.10.90
3 Rob **LOVEJOY** (23) 23.10.91
9 Erick **TORRES** (Mex) (22) 19.01.93

COACH
Owen **COYLE** (RoI) (48) 14.07.66

LOS ANGELES GALAXY

GOALKEEPERS
18 Jaime **PENEDO** (Pan) (33) 26.09.81
1 Brian **PERK** (25) 21.07.89
12 Brian **ROWE** (26) 16.11.88

DEFENDERS
20 AJ **DE LA GARZA** (Gum) (27) 04.11.87
2 Todd **DUNIVANT** (34) 26.12.80
33 Dan **GARGAN** (32) 14.12.82
4 Omar **GONZALEZ** (26) 11.10.88
22 **LEONARDO** (Bra) (27) 08.02.88
21 Tommy **MEYER** (24) 20.03.90
36 Oscar **SORTO** (20) 13.08.94

MIDFIELDERS
25 Rafael **GARCIA** (26) 19.12.88
6 Baggio **HUSIDIC** (Bos) (27) 19.05.87
24 Stefan **ISHIZAKI** (Swe) (32) 15.05.82
19 **JUNINHO** (Bra) (26) 08.01.89
14 Robbie **ROGERS** (27) 12.05.87
3 Mika **VAYRYNEN** (Swe) (33) 28.12.81
34 Kenney **WALKER** (26) 23.12.88

FORWARDS
16 Edson **BUDDLE** (33) 21.05.81
9 Alan **GORDON** (33) 16.10.81
38 Bradford **JAMIESON IV** (18) 18.11.96
7 Robbie **KEANE** (RoI) (34) 08.07.80
- Ignacio **MAGANTO** (Spa) (23) 02.01.92
32 Jack **McBEAN** (20) 15.12.94
40 Raul **MENDIOLA** (Mex) (20) 18.05.94
27 Charlie **RUGG** (24) 02.10.90
5 Jose **VILLARREAL** (21) 10.09.93
11 Gyasi **ZARDES** (23) 02.09.91

COACH
Bruce **ARENA** (63) 21.09.51

MONTREAL IMPACT

GOALKEEPERS
1 Evan **BUSH** (29) 06.03.86
40 Maxime **CREPEAU** (Can) (20) 11.05.94
22 Eric **KRONBERG** (31) 07.06.83
- Kristian **NICHT** (Ger) (32) 03.04.82

DEFENDERS
36 Víctor **CABRERA** (Arg) (22) 07.02.93
6 Hassoun **CAMARA** (Fra) (31) 03.02.84
23 Laurent **CIMAN** (Blg) (29) 05.08.85
55 Wandrille **LEFEVRE** (Fra) (25) 17.12.89
26 Adrian **LOPEZ** (Spa) (28) 25.02.87
3 Eric **MILLER** (22) 15.01.93
- Ambroise **OYONGO** (Cam) (23) 22.06.91
5 Bakary **SOUMARE** (Mli) (29) 09.11.85
51 Maxim **TISSOT** (Can) (22) 13.04.92
25 Donny **TOIA** (22) 28.05.92

MIDFIELDERS
29 Eric **ALEXANDER** (26) 14.04.88
27 Louis **BELAND-GOYETTE** (Can) (19) 15.09.95
8 Patrice **BERNIER** (Can) (35) 23.09.79
33 Marco **DONADEL** (Ita) (31) 21.04.83
11 Dilly **DUKA** (25) 15.09.89
28 Jeremy **GAGNON-LAPARE** (Can) (19) 09.03.95
16 Calum **MALLACE** (Sco) (24) 01.10.90
21 Justin **MAPP** (30) 18.10.84
10 Ignacio **PIATTI** (Arg) (30) 04.02.85
14 Nigel **REO-COKER** (Eng) (30) 14.05.84
15 Andres **ROMERO** (Arg) (25) 29.10.89
19 Blake **SMITH** (24) 17.01.91

FORWARDS
- Santiago **GONZALEZ** (Uru) (22) 11.06.92
24 Anthony **JACKSON-HAMEL** (Can) (21) 03.08.93
99 Jack **MCINERNEY** (22) 05.08.92
7 Dominic **ODURO** (Gha) (29) 13.08.85
39 Cameron **PORTER** (21) 23.05.93
17 Romario **WILLIAMS** (Jam) (20) 15.08.94

COACH
Frank **KLOPAS** (48) 01.09.66

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION

GOALKEEPERS
18 Brad **KNIGHTON** (30) 06.02.85
22 Bobby **SHUTTLEWORTH** (27) 13.05.87
26 Trevor **SPANGENBERG** (23) 21.04.91

DEFENDERS
30 Kevin **ALSTON** (26) 05.05.88
25 Darrius **BARNES** (28) 24.12.86
2 Andrew **FARRELL** (22) 02.04.92
23 Jose **GONCALVES** (Por) (29) 17.09.85
8 Chris **TIERNEY** (29) 09.01.86
28 Tyler **WOODBERRY** (23) 28.05.91

MIDFIELDERS
6 Scott **CALDWELL** (23) 15.03.91
12 Andy **DORMAN** (Wal) (32) 01.05.82
14 Diego **FAGUNDEZ** (Uru) (20) 14.02.95
5 Jeremy **HALL** (26) 11.09.88
13 Jermaine **JONES** (33) 03.11.81
16 Daigo **KOBAYASHI** (Jap) (32) 19.02.83
24 Lee **NGUYEN** (28) 07.10.86
11 Kelyn **ROWE** (23) 02.12.91
43 Tyler **RUDY** (21) 29.09.93
33 Donnie **SMITH** (24) 07.12.90

FORWARDS
17 Juan **AGUDELO** (22) 23.11.92
10 Teal **BUNBURY** (25) 27.02.90
9 Charlie **DAVIES** (28) 25.06.86
4 Steve **NEUMANN** (23) 02.10.91
7 Sean **OKOLI** (22) 03.02.93

COACH
Jay **HEAPS** (38) 02.08.76

NEW YORK CITY

GOALKEEPERS
1 Akira **FITZGERALD** (27) 05.07.87
18 Ryan **MEARA** (24) 15.11.90
12 Josh **SAUNDERS** (PR) (34) 02.03.81

DEFENDERS
5 Jeb **BROVSKY** (26) 03.12.88
24 Shay **FACEY** (Eng) (21) 07.01.94
21 Jason **HERNANDEZ** (31) 23.08.83
6 George **JOHN** (27) 20.03.87
2 Andres **MENDOZA** (Ecua) (25) 16.08.89
3 Kwame **WATSON-SIRIBOE** (28) 13.11.86
13 Josh **WILLIAMS** (26) 18.04.88
17 Chris **WINGERT** (32) 16.06.82

MIDFIELDERS
20 Mehdi **BALLOUCHY** (Mor) (31) 06.04.83
16 Connor **BRANDT** (22) 15.09.92
30 Javier **CALLE** (Col) (23) 29.04.91
10 Mix **DISKERUD** (24) 02.10.90
23 Matt **DUNN** (21) 13.01.94
11 Ned **GRABAVOY** (31) 01.07.83
4 Andrew **JACOBSON** (25) 25.09.89
15 Tommy **McNAMARA** (24) 06.02.91
88 Kwadwo **POKU** (Gha) (23) 19.02.92
26 Sebastian **VELASQUEZ** (Col) (24) 11.02.91

FORWARDS
14 Patrick **MULLINS** (23) 05.02.92
32 Adam **NEMEC** (Slk) (29) 02.09.85
19 Khiry **SHELTON** (21) 26.06.93
99 Tony **TAYLOR** (25) 13.07.89
7 David **VILLA** (Spa) (33) 03.12.81

COACH
Jason **KREIS** (42) 29.12.72

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

GOALKEEPERS
1 David **BINGHAM** (25) 19.10.89
13 Bryan **MEREDITH** (25) 02.08.89

DEFENDERS
26 Brandon **BARKLAGE** (28) 02.11.86
5 Víctor **BERNARDEZ** (Hon) (32) 24.05.82
20 Shaun **FRANCIS** (Jam) (28) 02.10.86
21 Clarence **GOODSON** (32) 17.05.82
2 Ty **HARDEN** (31) 06.03.84
38 Paulo **RENATO** (Por) (27) 14.05.87
3 Jordan **STEWART** (Eng) (33) 03.03.82
4 Marvell **WYNNE** (28) 08.05.86

MIDFIELDERS
27 Fatai **ALASHE** (21) 21.10.93
23 Leandro **BARRERA** (Arg) (24) 22.02.91
7 Cordell **CATO** (T&T) (22) 15.07.92
10 Matias Perez **GARCIA** (Arg) (30) 13.10.84
15 JJ **KOVAL** (22) 19.05.92
17 Sanna **NYASSI** (Gam) (26) 31.01.89
80 Jean-Baptiste **PIERAZZI** (Fra) (29) 17.06.85
6 Shea **SALINAS** (28) 24.06.86
9 Khari **STEPHENSON** (Jam) (34) 18.01.81

FORWARDS
11 Innocent **EMEGHARA** (Swi) (25) 27.05.89
19 Mike **FUCITO** (28) 29.03.86
14 Adam **JAHN** (24) 05.01.91
24 Steven **LENHART** (28) 28.08.86
12 Mark **SHERROD** (24) 13.08.90
22 Tommy **THOMPSON** (19) 15.08.95
8 Chris **WONDOLOWSKI** (32) 28.01.83

COACH
Dominic **KINNEAR** (47) 26.07.67

SEATTLE SOUNDERS

GOALKEEPERS
24 Stefan **FREI** (Swi) (28) 20.04.86
1 Troy **PERKINS** (33) 29.07.81

DEFENDERS
13 Andres **CORREA** (Col) (21) 29.01.94
12 Leonardo **GONZALEZ** (CR) (34) 21.11.80
31 Damion **LOWE** (Jam) (21) 05.05.93
14 Chad **MARSHALL** (30) 22.08.84
4 Tyrone **MEARS** (Eng) (32) 18.02.83
21 Jimmy **OCKFORD** (22) 10.06.92
15 Dylan **REMICK** (23) 19.05.91
20 Zach **SCOTT** (34) 02.07.80

MIDFIELDERS
6 Osvaldo **ALONSO** (Cub) (29) 11.11.85
42 Micheal **AZIRA** (Uga) (27) 22.08.87
2 Clint **DEMPSEY** (31) 09.03.83
3 Brad **EVANS** (29) 20.04.85
11 Aaron **KOVAR** (21) 14.08.93
25 Aaron **LONG** (22) 12.10.92
27 Lamar **NEAGLE** (27) 07.05.87
10 Marco **PAPPA** (Gtm) (27) 15.11.87
8 Gonzalo **PINEDA** (Mex) (32) 19.10.82
7 Cristian **ROLDAN** (19) 03.06.95
5 Andy **ROSE** (Eng) (25) 13.02.90

FORWARDS
19 Chad **BARRETT** (29) 30.04.85
33 Kenny **COOPER** (30) 21.10.84
17 Darwin **JONES** (22) 04.04.92
80 Victor **MANSARAY** (SLe) (18) 22.02.97
9 Obafemi **MARTINS** (Nga) (30) 28.10.84
77 Kevin **PARSEMAIN** (Mar) (27) 13.02.88

COACH
Sigi **SCHMID** (61) 20.03.53

SPORTING KANSAS CITY

GOALKEEPERS
21 Jon **KEMPIN** (21) 08.04.93
1 Luis **MARIN** (Chl) (31) 18.05.83
29 Tim **MELIA** (28) 15.05.86

DEFENDERS
17 Saad **ABDUL-SALAAM** (23) 08.09.91
23 Jalil **ANIBABA** (26) 19.10.88
5 Matt **BESLER** (28) 11.02.87
71 Marcel **DE JONG** (Can) (28) 15.10.86
13 Amadou **DIA** (Fra) (21) 08.06.93
4 Kevin **ELLIS** (23) 30.06.91
7 Chance **MYERS** (27) 07.12.87
3 Ike **OPARA** (26) 21.02.89
2 Erik **PALMER-BROWN** (17) 24.04.97
15 Seth **SINOVIC** (28) 28.01.87

MIDFIELDERS
11 Bernardo **ANOR** (Ven) (26) 24.05.88
16 Servando **CARRASCO** (26) 13.08.88
27 Roger **ESPINOZA** (Hon) (28) 25.10.86
10 Benny **FEILHABER** (30) 19.01.85
22 Connor **HALLISEY** (22) 09.02.93
12 Mikey **LOPEZ** (22) 20.02.93
94 Jimmy **MEDRANDA** (Col) (21) 07.02.94
21 Soni **MUSTIVAR** (Fra) (25) 12.02.90
6 Paulo **NAGAMURA** (Bra) (32) 02.03.83
8 Graham **ZUSI** (28) 18.08.86

FORWARDS
18 James **ANSU ROGERS** (SLe) (21) 27.06.93
14 Dom **DWYER** (Eng) (24) 30.07.90
9 Krisztian **NEMETH** (Hun) (26) 05.01.89
37 Jacob **PETERSON** (29) 27.01.86

COACH
Peter **VERMES** (48) 21.11.66

TORONTO

GOALKEEPERS
12 Joe **BENDIK** (25) 25.04.89
25 Alex **BONO** (20) 25.04.94
1 Chris **KONOPKA** (29) 14.04.85
40 Quillan **ROBERTS** (Can) (20) 13.09.94

DEFENDERS
28 Mark **BLOOM** (27) 25.11.87
13 Steven **CALDWELL** (Sco) (34) 12.09.80
3 Warren **CREAVALLE** (24) 14.08.90
6 Nick **HAGGLUND** (22) 14.09.92
5 Ashtone **MORGAN** (Can) (24) 09.02.91
2 Justin **MORROW** (27) 04.10.87
24 Damien **PERQUIS** (Pol) (30) 10.04.84
15 Eriq **ZAVALETA** (22) 02.08.92

MIDFIELDERS
34 Manny **APARICIO** (Can) (19) 17.09.95
4 Michael **BRADLEY** (27) 31.07.87
14 Jay **CHAPMAN** (Can) (21) 01.01.94
8 Benoit **CHEYROU** (Fra) (33) 03.05.81
18 Marco **DELGADO** (19) 16.05.95
11 **JACKSON** (Bra) (26) 03.06.88
19 Daniel **LOVITZ** (23) 27.08.91
20 Chris **MANNELLA** (Can) (20) 07.06.94
21 Jonathan **OSORIO** (Can) (22) 12.06.92
26 Collen **WARNER** (26) 24.06.88

FORWARDS
17 Jozy **ALTIDORE** (25) 06.11.89
7 Bright **DIKE** (Nga) (28) 02.02.87
55 Robbie **FINDLEY** (29) 04.08.85
10 Sebastian **GIOVINCO** (Ita) (28) 26.01.87
22 Jordan **HAMILTON** (Can) (18) 17.03.96
27 Luke **MOORE** (Eng) (29) 13.02.86

COACH
Greg **VANNEY** (40) 11.06.74

VANCOUVER WHITECAPS

GOALKEEPERS
24 Marco **CARDUCCI** (Can) (18) 26.09.96
1 David **OUSTED** (Den) (30) 01.02.85
70 Paolo **TORNAGHI** (Ita) (26) 21.06.88

DEFENDERS
3 Sam **ADEKUGBE** (Eng) (20) 16.01.95
33 Steven **BEITASHOUR** (Irn) (28) 01.02.87
22 Christian **DEAN** (21) 14.03.93
2 Jordan **HARVEY** (31) 28.01.84
44 Pa Modou **KAH** (Nor) (34) 30.07.80
26 Tim **PARKER** (22) 23.02.93
18 Diego **RODRIGUEZ** (Uru) (24) 08.01.91
27 Ethen **SAMPSON** (SAf) (21) 28.12.93
4 Kendall **WASTON** (CR) (27) 01.01.88

MIDFIELDERS
32 Marco **BUSTOS** (Can) (18) 22.04.96
20 Deybi **FLORES** (Hon) (18) 16.06.96
38 Kianz **FROESE** (Can) (18) 16.04.96
15 Matias **LABA** (Arg) (23) 11.12.91
25 Andre **LEWIS** (Jam) (20) 12.08.94
28 Gershon **KOFFIE** (Gha) (23) 25.08.91
30 Ben **McKENDRY** (Can) (34) 24.02.81
9 Nicolas **MEZQUIDA** (Uru) (23) 21.01.92
77 Pedro **MORALES** (Chl) (29) 25.05.85
7 Mauro **ROSALES** (Arg) (34) 24.02.81
31 Russell **TEIBERT** (Can) (21) 25.03.93

FORWARDS
34 Caleb **CLARKE** (Can) (21) 23.06.93
19 Erik **HURTADO** (24) 11.05.90
23 Kekuta **MANNEH** (Gam) (20) 30.12.94
11 Darren **MATTOCKS** (Jam) (24) 02.09.90
29 Octavio **RIVERO** (Uru) (23) 24.01.92

COACH
Carl **ROBINSON** (Wal) (38) 13.10.76

World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JUNE 21, 1970, MEXICO CITY: WORLD CUP FINAL

Brazil 4 Italy 1

The Brazil of Pele, Jairzinho, Rivelino, Tostao and Gerson reaches near perfection in a classic Final

Unstoppable... Rivelino skips through the Italy defence

On a sun-baked Estadio Azteca pitch, Brazil claimed the Jules Rimet trophy for a third time with the most accomplished World Cup Final performance of all time.

Pele, who as a 17-year-old had helped his country to win their first World Cup 12 years earlier, was the protagonist of this team, but he was surrounded by footballing artists.

For their part, Italy could call on the skills of their triumvirate of attacking players: Luigi Riva, Roberto Boninsegna and the wonderful Sandro Mazzola.

Adding to the occasion was the fact that the Final was shown on TV around the world in colour for the first time.

"It was not simply a magnificent, and thoroughly deserved, triumph for Brazil," read *World Soccer*'s report in the July 1970 edition, "here was proof that football, played the way it was meant to be performed, with artistry and skill, can still succeed in the modern era."

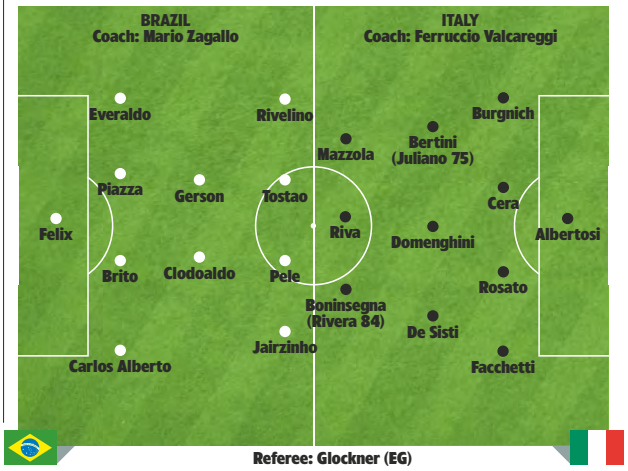
After Riva had two early chances to give Italy the lead, Pele rose high to head Brazil into the lead and "provided proof that his genius lives on".

Italy went in level at half-time, but in the second half the men in the famous yellow and blue really turned on the style, with Gerson, Jairzinho – who had scored in every one of his side's games in the tournament – and Carlos Alberto getting on the scoresheet.

Skipper...Brazil's Carlos Alberto

World Soccer's report summed up a fine exhibition, commenting: "Brazil won the Final with goals to spare, yet during an absorbing first half the Italians never looked out of their class. Their tight marking left Brazil with little room in which to work.

"But Brazil showed they can only be contained for so long. Sooner or later the motor purrs into top gear and goals are conceived out of nothing." WS



Referee: Glockner (EG)

KEY MOMENTS

In front...Pele celebrates his opening goal

2 min
The first chance of the game falls to Italy's Luigi Riva, who unleashes a rising shot that Felix tips over the bar.

16 min
Another chance falls to Riva but his header from 12 yards out, following a free-kick, loops over the crossbar.

18 min
Rivelino crosses and Pele heads down firmly past Albertosi. **1-0**

37 min
Boninsegna turns in the loose ball when Felix collides with his defenders. **1-1**

59 min
Rivelino hits the bar with a free-kick.

66 min
A 20-yard left-foot shot from Gerson restores Brazil's lead. **2-1**

Power...Gerson beats keeper Albertosi

71 min
Brazil extend their advantage when Gerson and Pele tee up Jairzinho. **3-1**

75 min
Mario Bertini becomes the first player to be substituted in a World Cup Final when replaced by Antonio Juliano.

86 min
A superb team move finishes with Pele rolling a simple side-foot pass into the path of the on-running captain Carlos Alberto who drills a low shot into the far corner. **4-1**

Record...Jairzinho (left) scored in every game

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